

**The Politics of Meaning in the  
Commemoration of the First World War  
in Britain, 1914-1939**

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### Abstract.

This thesis explores the meanings which commemoration of the First World War had for contemporaries. It examines the activity of war memorial committees, the conduct of ceremonies, and the interpretations of commemoration offered in newspapers, speeches and reminiscences, to discover how the public response to war was shaped into a formal commemorative practice. It focuses particularly on the erection of memorials, which might be either monuments or socially useful facilities.

It is shown that commemoration was conducted through the institutions of local politics, including local government bodies and voluntary associations. Discussions about the choice and design of memorials reflected the political and religious preoccupations of those who contributed to them. Where factions formed around competing proposals for a memorial, they reflected existing divisions within the community.

The argument is that commemoration was concerned with far more than mourning the war dead. It had a didactic purpose, and encouraged the discussion of contemporary political issues in terms which related these to the example of good citizenship set by the dead. What commemoration should mean to the general public became a matter for political debate. There was a consensus that the memory of the dead should be kept sacred, but how their example ought to be understood was open to differing interpretations. These differences were expressed through the partisan attribution of meanings to the symbolism of memorials and ceremonies. The sacred task of honouring the dead thus provided an opportunity for adherents of political, social or religious causes to promote their interests, in so far as they could articulate them as reflections on the war and its effects.

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## Introduction

There is a substantial literature about the impact of the First World War on cultural and social life, including studies which deal with the image of the war bequeathed to or constructed by the post-war world. However, writing about the most public and formalised of subsequent reflections on the war - official commemoration - has been surprisingly rare. War commemoration, whether as the erection of memorials or the holding of ceremonies, was a matter of great public interest in the 1920s and 30s. It provoked local controversies, and became associated with political debates of national significance about armaments, security policy and the League of Nations. The ideas about the war and death which were conveyed in it were regularly referred to in political arguments, and images or figures of speech derived from it became commonplaces of thought about the state of the nation or the world. Eric Homberger, writing in 1976 about the creation of the Cenotaph and the origin of Armistice Day ceremonies, concluded that 'the continued public observance of Armistice Day remains one of the most important, though least often discussed, aspects of British life between the wars',<sup>1</sup>.

The subject shares a theoretical interest with other discussions of public commemorations and festivals, ranging from carnival to the mass rallies of modern dictatorships. All these activities pose the question of their relation to political behaviour and social cohesion in the societies in which they take place. Although this study does not propose a theory for general application to such questions, I believe the approach it exemplifies would suit many other topics which involve the public representation of ideas and values. The politics of meaning in general is of at least

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<sup>1</sup> E.Homberger, 'The Story of the Cenotaph', Times Literary Supplement, 12 Nov. 1976, p.1430

as much interest to me as the commemoration of the Great War.

### 1. The Subject

Wars and what people did in them have been commemorated for thousands of years. Much of what was done to commemorate the First World War had precedents, some ancient, as in the forms of monument it inherited from the classical world, but many more recent. Nonetheless, it was exceptional in two important respects: first its scale - the number of people actively interested in it, and the volume of building work undertaken - and second, the attitude adopted in it towards the war dead. Commemoration focused principally on the dead, not only in the memorials erected, which was not a new departure, but also in a regular Day of the Dead, Armistice Day, which had no parallel in modern Britain. These dead were seen, traditionally enough, as heroic, but having not so much military as ethical qualities of the highest order. The Boer War and the Second World War were both commemorated, but in neither case were the dead valued to such a degree.

Almost saintly qualities were attributed to the war dead, and they were held up as the embodiment of the highest human values. These values were, principally, self-sacrifice, loyal comradeship, and the sense of duty. But the dead became more than just examples of virtue. They became something like ancestors or shades, to be propitiated by acts of gratitude and by conducting one's life as they would have wished. Those who honoured the dead did so, not simply because they thought the values incarnate in them were good ones, but out of a continuing sense of loyalty to their lost comrades, relatives and friends. The dead acquired an existence verging on the supernatural. They might no longer be here, but they still demanded loyalty. Their absence



was, in effect, transformed into an emotionally felt presence.

Such emotionally loaded veneration of the dead can fairly be seen as a cult. It had its ceremonial observances, its sacred sites, and its corps of privileged votaries - the ex-servicemen - who could claim special knowledge of its meaning, and took upon themselves a special duty to preserve its sanctity. It was, in fact, described in The Times, in November 1923, as a cult which should pervade the lives of its devotees:

Material tokens of...grief [i.e. war memorials] are well; but the true cult to which these dead call us is the following of their example... Bronze and marble perish, solemn temples shall dissolve...but the frame of the mind is everlasting, and this likeness of the dead we may preserve and we may show forth - not by the art of hands which are not ours [i.e. the hands of artists]...but in the life and conversation which are our very own. Whatsoever things we loved in these dead, whatsoever things we admired, remain and will remain in the minds of men<sup>2</sup>.

The writer went on to say that remembrance of the dead 'is becoming in the public mind and feeling a sign that the spiritual overcomes the material'.

In so far as they were unprecedented, the idioms of commemoration had to be invented. Even where commemoration drew on existing practices it had to be organised, and, where memorials were concerned, financed. It included, therefore, a large amount of creative effort. Much of this was the responsibility of professions traditionally thought of as creative, especially artists, architects, and writers,

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<sup>2</sup> Times, 10 Nov. 1923



but many of the actions performed and ideas expressed in commemoration were introduced at the prompting of others such as clergy or government ministers. In addition, it was normal practice for members of the public to be involved in the choice of a local war memorial, and thus they too had to decide what they wanted to say about the war and how best to say it. Discussion was a very large part of the creative process. The form and meaning of memorials were discussed in meetings and in the press. Ceremonies were accompanied by speeches and interpreted in newspaper editorials. The purpose of all this discussion was to attribute meanings to commemorative symbols and actions, by suggesting and arguing about how they should be understood.

What commemoration meant to contemporaries was, I contend, a matter which they themselves had to work out, and we must reconstruct their sense of meaning from their own creative process. This process was fundamentally political, because it relied for its organisation on the institutions of local politics, on the press, and on other forms of association whose activities, if not overtly political, had political implications. It required the exercise of official and unofficial power which is a normal part of the life of such institutions and associations. Personal feelings and needs were deeply involved in the practice of commemoration, but political organisation played an essential part in giving it form. At the same time, commemoration raised political issues which participants had to address, and it was exploited to pursue various political purposes which they believed to be valuable. All these factors influenced the meaning they attributed to symbols and ceremonies. I argue, therefore, that the meanings given to commemoration depended to a very large extent on the political procedures available to facilitate and control the conduct of it, and on the political aims of those who conducted it. This is what I am referring to as the politics of meaning.

Although commemoration was, in many respects, a religious phenomenon, I shall only deal with its religious aspects in passing, in so far as they bear on its organisation and political significance. There were precedents in late Victorian and Edwardian religious movements for attitudes displayed in the commemoration of the Great War dead, and for some of its more obviously mystical elements. There were divisions of opinion over the design of war cemeteries which owed much of their acrimony to a clash of religious beliefs which had little specifically to do with the war. Commemoration lent itself to ecumenism, and to a syncretic mixture of Christian and other beliefs which appeared elsewhere in religion and the arts in the inter-war period. To follow these themes fully would take me too far from my main concern with commemoration as a form of political expression through organised action.

However, religion, especially in war commemoration, is only partly separable from politics, and I have paid attention to the conjunctions between them. The churches played an important part in attaching a concern for world peace to the commemoration of the dead. For many people, disarmament and the League of Nations were not simply political issues but ethical and religious ideals. As the Archbishop of Canterbury told an interdenominational conference in October 1935, 'the principle of collective responsibility for the peace of the world' through the League was 'a practical application of the principles of Christianity'<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Headway, The Journal of the League of Nations Union, v.17, n.11, Nov. 1935, p.211



## 2.Theoretical Foundations

Many attempts by historians to understand the social impact of political symbols have, I believe, been hampered by a form of analysis which artificially divides the symbolic, as a cultural phenomenon, from social and economic forms of action. In general, they have assumed that symbols express ideas - as if they were translations of concepts, whose essential form is verbal, into visual images and gestures<sup>4</sup>. This assumption implies that symbolic objects and actions should be understood as if they were forms of language, and that their force or value for their users lies in the existence of coded messages which they convey. If, however, we look closely at how the symbols of war commemoration were produced and used, we discover that a great deal more was involved than the utterance and understanding of ideas. In fact, to see these symbols in such terms obscures a very large part of their relation to the behaviour of their creators and audiences. The following paragraphs are only a sketch for the theoretical justification of an alternative position. I hope to develop the arguments involved on another occasion.

The most systematic historical studies to date of symbolism as a political instrument have been founded on the work of

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<sup>4</sup> Maurice Agulhon's study of French republican imagery is an important precursor of current work on political symbolism, although the question he set himself is different. He sees the symbols and monuments he examines as reflecting the transformations of republican ideas, and therefore treats them as evidence of transformations, rather than as the means by which transformations came about. While he discusses many instances where the public display of symbols contributed to political conflict, he does not explicitly analyse their political efficacy, nor how they contributed to social stability or change. See M.Agulhon, Marianne into Battle, Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880, (tr. J.Lloyd), Cambridge 1981



Clifford Geertz<sup>5</sup>. Much of this work carries the implication that beliefs and cultural activities have their own autonomous life and power, and cannot simply be understood as by-products of supposedly larger and more potent social forces such as economic change. Instead, cultural processes, especially forms of representation, are seen as themselves formative influences on social order and change. I share the conviction that cultural activities are important elements in creating social stability or change, and two of the themes which often feature in such work appear in this thesis: the idea of the sacred, and conflict over the interpretation of symbols. However, my argument differs from those based on Geertz in two respects. The first has to do with the organisation of symbolic acts or the production of symbols, the second with the nature of symbolic meaning.

It is not usual practice for historians to give a theoretical account of the basis on which they analyse symbolism. Those who follow Geertz have taken up a variety

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<sup>5</sup> L.Hunt, Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution, London 1984, and A.Ben-Amos, 'The Sacred Centre of Power: Paris and Republican State Funerals', Journal of Interdisciplinary History, v.22, n.1, Summer 1991, pp.27-48 make use of the concept of charisma taken by Geertz from Edward Shils. See C.Geertz, 'Centers, Kings and Charisma', in J.Ben-David and T.Nichols Clark (eds), Culture and its Creators, Essays in Honour of Edward Shils, London 1977, pp.150-171. P.A.Pickering, 'Class Without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement', Past and Present, n.112, Aug. 1986, pp.144-162, and J.Epstein, 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth-century England', Past and Present, n.122, Feb. 1989, pp.75-118, make some use of Geertz's concepts of personality and charisma, while addressing themselves chiefly to questions raised by Gareth Stedman-Jones about the restrictive effect of language on the political imagination. D.Cannadine takes the idea of 'thick description' from Geertz, to argue that the meaning of state ritual depends on its political context, and is not simply given by its form. See D.Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition", c.1820-1977, in E.Hobsbawm and T.Ranger (eds) The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge 1984, pp.101-164



of different aspects of his work rather than pursued a distinctive analytical programme. However, I will outline what seem to me to be characteristic features of their work. Their analyses imply that the social function of symbols is to satisfy cognitive or emotional needs. Symbols and rituals, it is suggested, represent the social world as if it was organised according to certain categories<sup>6</sup>. People come to accept these categories as natural, and as necessarily true descriptions of reality, either through acquiring familiarity with them in the normal process of socialisation (in societies where traditional authority remains in force), or through deliberately adopting a new outlook, involving a new set of categories (where a change in the structure of power has occurred)<sup>7</sup>. In so far as categories are shared, they provide individuals with a common understanding of the form and processes of the society they inhabit, and with common values through which they can relate to one another<sup>8</sup>.

According to Geertz, such shared categories, expressed in symbols and entailing a body of social values, are perceived as sacred, revealing what appears to be an ultimate truth about the character of human society and its relation to nature<sup>9</sup>. The 'sacred', in this sense, stands at the centre of the social order, as an explanation of it, and as a

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<sup>6</sup> For example, M.Ryan sees the civic parade in the United States as 'a public lexicon that organised the diverse population of the city into manageable categories', thus performing a 'cultural and social service during times of major transformation'. See M.Ryan, 'The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order', in L.Hunt (ed), The New Cultural History, London 1989, pp.131-153

<sup>7</sup> C.Geertz, 'Centers, Kings and Charisma', especially pp.152-153

<sup>8</sup> See C.Geertz, 'Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols', in Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, Selected Essays, New York 1973, pp.126-141

<sup>9</sup> C.Geertz, 'Centers, Kings and Charisma', p.171; see also 'Ethos, World View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols'



guarantee of its stability. When these categories cease to be credible, new ones have to be found and embodied in symbolic expressions. They then provide the basis for new standards of social behaviour and new institutions<sup>10</sup>. If the categories in question cease to be credible only to a section of society, members of that section attempt to reformulate them and embody them in a revised symbolism. They deploy their new system of symbols in opposition to the prevailing system, to the values associated with it, and to the social structure it sustains, as a political challenge<sup>11</sup>.

Now, the first part of my criticism is that this approach to political symbolism does not do justice to the forms of organisation through which symbols are produced. It thus obscures the importance of social processes other than the representation of ideas in shaping symbolic activity and imagery. In modern western society the most important of these processes are, on the one hand, commerce and, on the other, the power of institutions to promote public action, to control public space, and to police behaviour. Political performances of the sort so often discussed in Geertzian terms involve policing audiences as much as addressing them, and pageants of state require organisation and money which are supplied by a bureaucracy with the ultimate sanction of force against its subjects. The part played by institutional power in organising these activities must call into question the extent to which they depend on or are animated by shared categories of thought, values or desires.

A useful and accessible critique of the idea that social action is directed principally through the agency of shared forms of understanding has been given by Abercrombie, Hill

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<sup>10</sup> L.Hunt, Politics, Culture and Class, is an example of this position.

<sup>11</sup> This position can be found in J.Epstein, 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty'.



and Turner<sup>12</sup>. They note the extent to which fundamental values are not shared throughout a society, and stress that conformity to behavioural norms is often purely pragmatic<sup>13</sup>. They also insist on the importance of economic needs and the 'physical constraints of political force' in predisposing people to acquiesce in the actions of political authorities<sup>14</sup>. My own research has made me sympathetic to their conclusions. However, they have little to say about the undoubted importance of symbolic activity in political life. My intention here is to account for its importance in a way which gives due weight to physical force and economic imperatives.

The second part of my criticism is that much existing work relies on a mistaken conception of the meaning of symbols. I share Dan Sperber's concern that the term 'meaning' is often used in an unacceptably loose way in the analysis of cultural action<sup>15</sup>. Sperber has argued that the notion of meaning cannot fruitfully be applied to symbols at all, in the sense of their having a retrievable message encoded in them. In his view, the interpretation of a symbol, the construction of a proposed paraphrase of its significance, does not reveal a meaning which it communicates, nor does it tell us what purpose the symbol serves for its users. It is, rather, an addition to the symbol, a continuation and development of it<sup>16</sup>.

I cannot fully share Sperber's rejection of the idea of meaning, as contemporaries clearly thought that war

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<sup>12</sup> N.Abercrombie, S.Hill and B.Turner, The Dominant Ideology Thesis, London 1980

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.55

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.57

<sup>15</sup> D.Sperber, Rethinking Symbolism, Cambridge 1975, pp.8-16

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.48

memorials and commemorative ceremonies did and should have meanings which could be made explicit in interpretation. But it is useful to follow him in regarding these interpretations as elaborations of the symbols, rather than as revelations of encoded meanings. These elaborations gave them relevance to a particular topic, made them appear important and, indeed, 'meaningful'. In other words: the process of interpretation did not spell out meanings which ceremonies and memorials were understood to utter, rather it attributed meaning to them, making them into valued symbols. Indeed, as chapter 8 will show, some contemporaries were perfectly aware that the meaning of a symbol was constructed by its audience, and not simply given in its appearance<sup>17</sup>. Why people should have wished to join in the process of giving meaning to symbols is the main question addressed in this thesis, and my conclusions are quite different from Sperber's.

'Meaning' is notoriously difficult to define, and even those who study 'the production of meanings' seem rarely to attempt it. The best definition I can offer here does not have a theoretical basis, but describes the empirical matter which I have taken to constitute 'meaning' in the minds of those whose 'politics of meaning' I have studied. I take the meaning of a symbol or gesture to be the thought or action which a person regards as the appropriate response to it. This meaning is not, however, a result of 'reading' or understanding the symbol, but a character attributed to it according to the needs and situation of the respondent. It is not a paraphrase of the symbol but a description of the respondent's relation to it, and takes account of the motives on which that relation is based. For evidence of the contemporary meanings of commemoration I have asked: how did contemporaries respond, first, to the proposal that they should commemorate the dead, and, second, to memorials and

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<sup>17</sup> See pp. 305-307



ceremonies; how did they think they should respond, and how did they want others to respond?

My own treatment of political symbolism is to some extent indebted to J.L.Austin's ideas about language set out in his book How To Do Things With Words. However, I have taken from his work no more than a suggestion which I found in it, and my argument is not in any sense a systematic application of his philosophy. Austin holds that an utterance in the form of a statement may be, at the same time, the performance of some other kind of action<sup>18</sup>. He calls these utterances 'performative' because they entail the performance of an action apart simply from uttering words. One example he gives is making a promise. In saying that one will do something ('I promise to pay...'), one is also committing oneself to do that thing in the future. Having used the appropriate form of words 'I promise...' to someone, the hearer will expect one to act accordingly; that is the point of the exercise. In some cases, the law may be used against one if one fails to honour the undertaking thus given. The statement that 'I promise' amounts, therefore, to making a binding and enforceable commitment. In this case, a verbal utterance turns out to be a social action with important consequences for one's relationships with other people. Subsequently, Austin extends this insight, and describes all verbal utterances in terms of the kinds of action they involve. These range from 'giving a description' to 'pronouncing [a judicial] sentence',<sup>19</sup>.

Austin's work is essentially concerned with words, but here I shall extend it to other forms of representation<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> J.L.Austin, How To Do Things With Words, Oxford 1976, pp.4-7

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp.98-99

<sup>20</sup> Some anthropologists have also adapted Austin's ideas to their own subject; see M.Bloch (ed), Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society, London 1975

Words were extremely important in war commemoration, but ceremonies, gestures and visual images were of more central importance. Together with words, they provided the means for saying things about the war and death. For my purpose then, the interest of Austin's ideas lies in the following implication: that saying something (in whatever medium) serves, at the same time, to form relations amongst interlocutors which are governed by conventions, frequently backed up by the law, or by some other form of official or unofficial power. In war commemoration, saying things about the dead led to the formation of relationships both amongst those who organised the erection of memorials, and amongst those who acted as the audience. These relationships were governed by certain conventions: a representative selection of local people should be involved in war memorial committees, and the money they used should be raised voluntarily. People with opposing views should sink their differences and join together in supporting and respecting whatever was finally chosen as a memorial, whether or not it took the form they would have preferred. Lastly, such conventionally structured relationships were subject to the discipline of institutional power, in that official facilities offered by local authorities and police forces usually provided the basis for the necessary consultation, co-operation and public action.

To join in the creative, meaning-giving, processes of commemoration one had to join in the relationships prescribed by convention. But Austin's theory of performative utterances does not lead to a complete picture of commemorative action. The relationships formed to conduct commemoration were not only a conventional necessity; they were equally necessary in providing the practical resources - above all, money - required for the erection of memorials. Furthermore, because commemoration entailed assembling resources and creating a large audience, it offered potential benefits to participants for purposes



which had nothing intrinsically to do with honouring the dead. It offered funds which could be put to philanthropic uses, a market for artists, a platform for politicians. These practical benefits were recognised by contemporaries and exploited. Consequently, any account of the relationships formed in commemoration, and the effect they had on commemorative practice, has to reach beyond people's feelings about the dead and the conventions through which these were articulated, and consider other motives for their participation.

In order to integrate the conventional and practical dimensions of commemoration, I propose to consider it chiefly as a process by which the participants formed relationships with each other. I will investigate how relationships were constructed, and what purposes they served, in order to understand the range of things which were being done through commemoration. Specifically, I will examine the institutional power applied in forming and managing these relationships, and the conventions which prompted public expectations of how they should work and what they should achieve. In this way, I will try to analyse a cultural activity - commemoration as a means by which the dead, and through them values, were represented - in relation to the exercise of formal and informal political power, without collapsing one into the other, but also without disengaging them from each other.

### 3. The Course of the Argument

Most of the documentary evidence of commemorative practices and ideas in this study has been derived from the records of committees set up to erect local war memorials. War memorial committees were responsible to the public for the decisions they made and for their stewardship of subscription funds. Thus they kept records of their

proceedings which were often lodged with the local authority when the memorial was complete. In many cases the process of organising and making decisions about war memorials, with all the difficulties and disagreements it entailed, is well documented. The business of erecting a memorial was the most formidable task faced by local communities in their commemoration of the dead. Those responsible for erecting it were concerned that it should represent themselves and their ideas about the war and the dead to contemporaries and posterity in a satisfactory light. They also had to win substantial public assent to what they intended to set up. All this involved making decisions about the meaning of war commemoration. The decision-making process demonstrates the assumptions involved in war commemoration, and the misunderstandings and divisions of opinion which could and did occur.

Erecting a memorial was as much an act of homage as joining in a ceremony. It was not merely the provision of an object at which ritual acts could subsequently be performed, or an image embodying a statement about the dead, but was the making of a sacrifice in honour and gratitude to them. For this reason, I treat both the erection of memorials and the conduct of ceremonies as closely related forms of action. Working to make a memorial by organising a local memorial committee, and by collecting for or giving to the memorial fund, was an act with a moral meaning in its own right. A fund-raiser in Sheffield saw it as such when she wrote to the Town Clerk, 'do let us endeavour to reach the hearts of the people, that our war memorial may be an outpouring of love and enthusiasm'<sup>21</sup>. Part of the meaning of any completed memorial was that just such an act had been performed, the necessary sacrifice made, the dead properly appreciated, by a particular group of people in a particular place. So I see commemoration as consisting of, on the one

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<sup>21</sup> Sheffield Record Office, CA 653 (17), War Memorial Subcommittee, letter from L. Rhoden, 14 Feb. 1925



hand, regularly repeated acts - the annual Armistice Day and other ceremonies - and on the other hand, the unrepeatable acts involved in erecting a memorial: organising, making decisions, collecting money, building, which could take several years to complete.

My argument follows the division into two parts which this distinction between types of action suggests. The first six chapters examine the erection of memorials, considering their meaning principally in the light of the acts involved in their production. The first chapter introduces the principal actors - local committees - and the conventions which prescribed how they should work, while the second looks at the origins of these conventions in the nineteenth century and in the Great War itself. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss how people thought about the different types of memorial which they might erect, and how a community eventually chose one. In them, I pay attention to the political ideas and motives of participants, and to the exercise of political power through which they attempted to achieve their aims. Chapters 5 and 6 consider the parts played by artists in commemoration, describing the conventions on which their work was based, and how they organised their relations with clients.

The last three chapters examine other aspects of war commemoration, including the regular ceremonies and the press comments which offered interpretations of them. In this wider context, I discuss why commemoration took the form it did, and how meanings were attributed to it, in order to explain more comprehensively the attitudes of contemporaries to memorials, and what they achieved through their production. Chapter 7 describes the moral ideas which were represented in the commemorative view of the dead. Chapter 8 deals with the political ideas which were attached to commemoration, and the disagreements to which they frequently led. Chapter 9 shows how commemoration was

sustained as united action on a nationwide scale, despite conflicts amongst its participants, through shared emotion, the etiquette of respect for the dead, and the exercise of power.



## Chapter 1

## The Composition of a National Cult

The commemoration of the Great War in the inter-war period, consisted mainly of two activities: performing ceremonies and making memorials. Both occurred, literally, almost everywhere; in private as well as in public places, and in a great variety of communities and institutions. It was formalised into a national observance of intense public interest which kept its form for twenty years until overshadowed by a second world war. Throughout the country, the procedures for the erection of war memorials and ceremonies on Armistice Day followed common patterns, and memorials are often of similar appearance, suggesting a nationwide uniformity of aims and attitudes, and a desire to conform to national stereotypes. Nonetheless, commemoration focused closely on the part played in the war by local communities, and on the local people who had been killed. It depended for its conduct very largely on local initiative. This chapter offers first an impression of the scope of commemorative activity and of the responses it elicited. It then describes the local organisations which sustained it, and how they were formed by the communities in which they acted.

## 1. The Nation's Act of Homage

At 11 a.m. on 11 November, Armistice Day, every year, almost all activity whether private or public, was interrupted for two minutes, 'in some ways the most remarkable two minutes since the Creation'<sup>1</sup>, to observe the Great Silence in memory of the dead. Formal ceremonies with prayers, the laying of wreaths at memorials, and speeches, were held in town squares, on village greens, in shops, offices, factories,

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<sup>1</sup> Daily Mail, 11 Nov. 1919

schools and other places. The first Great Silence was celebrated in 1919 on the first anniversary of the Armistice. At Waring and Gillows, the famous Oxford Street drapery store, staff and customers listened to an address by Sir Samuel Waring and sang the National Anthem. At Euston the chairman of the London and North Western Railway presided over a crowded memorial service in the main hall of the station. Prison inmates stopped work at Parkhurst jail<sup>2</sup>. In 1920 the Silence at the Motor Show began and ended with a bugle call<sup>3</sup>. In 1921 the Last Post was sounded from the parapet of Selfridges<sup>4</sup>.

Where there was no formal ceremony people went to windows or into the street to form an impromptu congregation. In Leeds 'the busy thoroughfares of the city presented a strange and reverent aspect as pedestrians stood still, the male section baring their heads', the Morning Post reported in 1919<sup>5</sup>. The Manchester Guardian's London correspondent noticed 'that nearly everyone wanted to be in the open air...It was as though a message was really being sent and received, and that its transmission must be through the void'<sup>6</sup>. It may not have seemed to everyone, as it did to a Daily Mail writer, that 'a sort of mysticism made itself felt'<sup>7</sup> - newspapers made it their business to dramatise the occasion - but for many the commemoration of the war dead was an intense emotional experience, and it was expected to be so. The Daily Herald recorded in that first Armistice

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<sup>2</sup> Morning Post, 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>3</sup> Times, 12 Nov. 1920

<sup>4</sup> E.Homberger, 'Story of the Cenotaph', p.1430

<sup>5</sup> Morning Post, 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>6</sup> Manchester Guardian, 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>7</sup> Daily Mail, 12 Nov. 1919



silence, 'women sobbed and even men were moved to tears',<sup>8</sup>. The Daily Mail reported an elderly police sergeant crying. 'I speak of what I saw,' the writer insisted, lest readers should be sceptical<sup>9</sup>.

Year after year tens of thousands turned out on Armistice Day to join in the silence at municipal ceremonies. In 1926 thirty or forty thousand people attended Bristol's Remembrance ceremony, at Sheffield fifty thousand<sup>10</sup>. In Manchester twenty thousand assembled in Albert Square on Armistice Day 1935, in Dublin thirty thousand in Phoenix Park<sup>11</sup>. By the late 1920s there was some sense of change in the public mood at ceremonies. Remembrance Day was becoming more formal, less emotionally charged according to several commentators. The Times found it 'a slightly more reasoned, slightly less emotional reverence' in 1926<sup>12</sup>. In 1933 the Morning Post found that 'the crowd is no longer tragic with mourning; time, which confirms the Armistice Ceremony, gradually remits its overburdening unhappiness',<sup>13</sup>.

But any suggestion for a relaxation of the strict etiquette of remembrance aroused fierce opposition. In 1930 the Labour government proposed informally that foreign delegations should no longer, as a matter of protocol, be expected to lay wreaths on war memorials. These acts were not regular formal ceremonies; they were purely occasional, and not significant public events. All the same, Ramsey MacDonald, the Prime Minister, was criticised in Parliament

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<sup>8</sup> Daily Herald, 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>9</sup> Daily Mail, 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>10</sup> E.Homberger, 'Story of the Cenotaph', p.1430

<sup>11</sup> Manchester Guardian, 18 Nov. 1935

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in E. Homberger, 'Story of the Cenotaph', p.1430

<sup>13</sup> Morning Post, 13 Nov. 1933

for interfering with the right to lay wreaths. In defence of the proposal, he explained that the point had been 'to obviate any risk of a ceremony which should be simple and spontaneous becoming a mere formality of international courtesy',<sup>14</sup>. The government's proposal had been 'out of touch with public feeling', said the Liberal News Chronicle<sup>15</sup>. Commenting at the same time on the Bishop of Durham's recent proposal to abolish Armistice Day, the paper said this would only be appropriate when 'nations have established universal peace'. The British Legion's national executive resolved in October 1930 that it 'adheres to the policy which has inspired the Legion since its inception that no diminution of respect for the memory of our fallen comrades will be tolerated',<sup>16</sup>. Whatever change may have occurred in the mood of those who attended ceremonies, interest in them and the desire for them remained very strong in the 1930s.

Commemorating the war dead was regarded as a sacred act. 11 November became known as 'Armistice tide' amongst some people<sup>17</sup>, giving it the air of an ancient religious tradition. In 1920 The Times described the attendance at the newly unveiled Cenotaph in Whitehall and the Grave of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey (estimated at over half a million people in four days) as a 'Great Pilgrimage', comparing it to Lourdes<sup>18</sup>. In 1925 letter writers to The Times were arguing whether or not it was decent to hold

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<sup>14</sup> Parliamentary Debates, fifth series, v.244 p.35, 29 Oct. 1930

<sup>15</sup> News Chronicle, 11 Nov. 1930

<sup>16</sup> Wirral Archives Service, ZWO/16, Hoylake and West Kirby War Memorial Fund, v.3, press cutting

<sup>17</sup> Daily Mail, 8 Nov. 1930; Manchester Guardian, 10 Nov. 1930, letter from the Secretary, Haig Fund

<sup>18</sup> Times, 15 Nov. 1920



#### ERRATUM

p.29, lines 17-19, Consequently...then should read:  
Consequently churches and other groups, religious and secular,  
held remembrance services and ceremonies during the weekends  
on either side of 11 November.

reunion parties or dances on Armistice night, as many ex-servicemen did<sup>19</sup>.

The sense of sanctity continued into the 1930s. In 1930 the Bishop of Ripon called Armistice Day 'a religious anniversary...the new Good Friday of the post-war world'<sup>20</sup>. A correspondent in the Morning Post likened it to Good Friday in 1933<sup>21</sup>. In the approach to the 1935 general election, party workers in some places suspended their campaigns for the day on 11 November. Randolph Churchill was criticised for going ahead with his campaign meetings in Liverpool and, while excusing his action, admitted that 'the Two Minutes Silence is the most sacred ceremony Britain observes'<sup>22</sup>.

11 November was not the only 'Day of the Glorious Dead'<sup>23</sup>. Normally it fell on a working day, which limited the opportunity most people had to attend memorial church services. Consequently the churches observed the nearest Sunday to it as Remembrance Sunday, and held their own religious ceremonies then. Particular local days of remembrance also existed. Stockport held a local military anniversary, Saint Julien Day, on 30 July<sup>24</sup>. At Llandrindod Wells the anniversary of the unveiling of the town war memorial was kept as a remembrance day (partly

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<sup>19</sup> Times, 21,22,25 & 26 Oct. 1925

<sup>20</sup> Manchester Guardian, 10 Nov. 1930

<sup>21</sup> Morning Post, 14 Nov. 1933

<sup>22</sup> Manchester Guardian, 11 Nov. 1935

<sup>23</sup> The term was used by Daily Mail, 11 Nov. 1919, and Morning Post, 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>24</sup> Stockport Advertiser, 5 Oct. 1921



because, being in July, the weather was likely to be better)<sup>25</sup>. In Bethnal Green a service was held every year in mid-June to commemorate 18 local school children who had been killed in an air raid in 1917<sup>26</sup>. On All Souls Day 1919 memorial services were held in churches and 'an exceptionally large number of people made the pilgrimage to Whitehall to lay flowers on the base of the Cenotaph'<sup>27</sup>, and similar church services were held on the same day in 1920<sup>28</sup>. Less regularly placed events might start with a formal homage to the dead. At Sheffield, in March 1927, the English Junior 10 Mile Road Walking Championship started with the laying of a wreath at the city war memorial<sup>29</sup>. At any other time, perhaps on the anniversary of a death, at Christmas or another family festival, individuals might make their own private homage by leaving flowers on their local war memorial.

In many of the locations where people stopped to observe the Great Silence there were war memorials. They might be anything from a simple tablet on a wall to a major public building. As well as the public memorials in towns and villages, they were to be found in public institutions, in the premises of commercial firms, in clubrooms, churches and schools. The Imperial War Graves Commission put up memorials of its own in cemeteries where servicemen who had died in the many military hospitals were buried. Most memorials were dedicated to the dead of a specific locality

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<sup>25</sup> Powys Archives, R/UD/LW/234, Llandrindod Wells War Memorial, file 3, letter from A.G.Camp to D.C.Davis 13 July 1922

<sup>26</sup> Tower Hamlets Local Studies Library, 082.2 collection contains cuttings from 1920 to 1935 of this event.

<sup>27</sup> Times, 3 Nov. 1919

<sup>28</sup> Church Times, 12 Nov. 1920

<sup>29</sup> Sheffield Record Office, CA 653 (19), letter from Chief Constable to Town Clerk 14 Mar. 1927

or institution, but some commemorated more broadly-defined groups. For example, all the British cyclists who had died in the war are commemorated on Meriden green, near Birmingham (where annual remembrance ceremonies were also held<sup>30</sup>). Very occasionally a memorial might commemorate people from no clear group. On the memorial which local ex-servicemen erected in Harrogate to 'their fallen comrades', it is not clear whether this meant exclusively Harrogate men, or simply any comrades they had lost during the war. Animals, too, had their memorials - the horses of the Empire in Saint Jude's church, Hampstead Garden Suburb, all service animals at an RSPCA memorial clinic in Kilburn and in the Scottish National War Memorial.

The commissioning and building of memorials continued throughout the twenties and thirties, though at a diminishing rate. Liverpool's city cenotaph was only unveiled in 1930, Bristol's in 1932 and Gloucester's in 1933<sup>31</sup>. As long after the Armistice as the late 1930s, The Times was still reporting the unveiling of memorials. Most of them were military and in Flanders, but some were in Britain. London University unveiled a memorial to members of its Officer Training Corps killed in the Great War in January 1937, having had to wait for the new University building to be sufficiently near completion<sup>32</sup>. In December 1937 a memorial window, donated anonymously and dedicated to all Britons killed in the war, was unveiled at Sherburn-in-Elmet parish church<sup>33</sup>. The very last unveiling of a local war memorial recorded by The Times before the outbreak of

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<sup>30</sup> Times, 2 May 1937

<sup>31</sup> See Derek Boorman, At the Going Down of the Sun: British First World War Memorials, Dunnington Hall, 1988, for an extensive survey of memorials in Britain.

<sup>32</sup> Times, 27 Jan. 1937

<sup>33</sup> Times, 11 Nov. 1937



the next war was to townsmen of Mumbles, a seaside resort near Swansea, erected in July 1939<sup>34</sup>.

Local war memorials were expected to be of interest to travellers and tourists as much as to residents who had some personal connection with them. A booklet for the Holidays on Merseyside Association, published in 1934, contained a photograph of the Liverpool memorial to ship's engineers. The three volume guide book Wonderful Britain, published in parts in 1928 and '29, devoted three out of its over one hundred chapters to 'Our War Memorials', with a considerable number of photographs. This book was intended both for the general reader and for the rising number of leisure motorists, to whom it offered suggestions for excursions along with road maps<sup>35</sup>. A large number of postcards of local war memorials were published, ranging from crosses in tiny villages to big city monuments<sup>36</sup>. People could come to see the memorial in a place they visited and leave with a souvenir of it. Referring to the density and visibility of local memorials, the novelist Ian Hay wrote, 'every English highway is now one continuous memorial avenue. The cumulative effect upon the traveller's mind is almost unendurable in its poignancy'<sup>37</sup>. Images of war memorials were circulated in other forms as well. Ceramic reproductions of the Whitehall Cenotaph and the figure of Edith Cavell from her monument at Saint Martin in the

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<sup>34</sup> Times, 31 July 1939

<sup>35</sup> J.A.Hammerton (ed), Wonderful Britain. Its Highways, Byways and Historic Places, London, 1928/29, v.3, n.22, 'Our War Memorials:1 - The London Area', C.Barman, pp.1017-1036, v.3, n.23, 'Our War Memorials:2 - The Great Cities and Some Others', F.J.Maclean, pp.1083-1102, v.3, n.24, 'Our War Memorials:3 - In Town and Village', W.F.Aitken, pp.1137-1156

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Imperial War Museum Department of Printed Books, album of postcards, class 333.0

<sup>37</sup> I.Hay, Their Name Liveth: the Scottish National War Memorial, London 1931, p.4

Fields, London, suitable for the mantelpiece, were available<sup>38</sup>. In some cases images of memorials had a more personal value, such as the photographs of James Budgett and Company's memorial tablet, which were presented to the next of kin of those commemorated on it<sup>39</sup>.

Thus the commemoration of the Great War dead became and remained a subject of intense public interest in the 1920s and '30s. It transcended boundaries of religious denomination, and included many people of no explicit religious allegiance at all. In 1923, when it was proposed that there should be no ceremony at the Cenotaph, because 11 November fell on a Sunday, there were vigorous objections that those who no longer attended church would be excluded from the commemoration of the dead that year<sup>40</sup>. In the two minutes silence, commemoration had become an observance virtually obligatory for all citizens. It had a constantly visible presence in the ubiquitous memorials to the dead. Male passers-by raised their hats to the Cenotaph in Whitehall, as the centre of the commemorative cult, on ordinary days as much as on ceremonial occasions. This custom, too, persisted into the 1930s<sup>41</sup>.

The core of all this activity was the two minutes silence, which gave commemoration of the dead a co-ordinated national dimension. It was instituted by the government, but relied for its implementation on voluntary co-operation from local authorities and others who controlled public spaces or places of work. The Cabinet took the decision that the

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<sup>38</sup> See B.Jones and B.Howell, Popular Arts of the First World War, London 1972

<sup>39</sup> Guildhall Library, 20,374, James Budgett & Son, letters of appreciation for memorial tablet

<sup>40</sup> Times, 23 Oct. 1923

<sup>41</sup> Its continuation was noted by Sir Ian Hamilton in F.C.Inglis, The Scottish National War Memorial, Edinburgh 1932, p.7



silence should be observed on the first anniversary of the Armistice on the grounds that, although its future repetition might prove inconvenient, 'the realisation by the nation of the magnitude of its deliverance from the perils of the War' outweighed this consideration. Ministers thought the anniversary of the actual cessation of fighting was the most appropriate time to make a tribute to the dead. A committee chaired by Lord Milner was given charge of the arrangements, and 'corresponding action so far as practicable' throughout the Empire was envisaged<sup>42</sup>. The Cabinet sought the King's approval for the ceremony. A royal proclamation was issued that for two minutes 'all work, all sound, and all locomotion should cease, so that, in perfect stillness, the thoughts of everyone may be concentrated on reverent remembrance of the Glorious Dead'<sup>43</sup>. The idea was publicly attributed to the King; 'the King's happy inspiration' the Daily Mail called it<sup>44</sup>.

The government communicated its intentions to those members of the public whose co-operation it hoped for through the newspaper press. The official press-release announcing the arrangements for Armistice Day 1919<sup>45</sup> stated:

The Government feel that carrying out the King's wishes must be left to the sympathetic good will of the community. No general instructions can ensure the success of a ceremony which can only be truly impressive if it is universal and spontaneous.

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<sup>42</sup> Public Record Office, CAB 23/18, Minutes, 5 Nov. 1919, pp.10-14

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in R.Coppin, 'Remembrance Sunday', Theology v.68, n.545, November 1965, pp.525-30

<sup>44</sup> Daily Mail, 11 Nov. 1919

<sup>45</sup> Public Record Office, HO 45: 11557, file 392664/1

The government was simply issuing 'suggestions...to afford some guidance to local authorities and the nation generally', it said. The Metropolitan Police were instructed to stop the traffic for two minutes, and it was hoped that other local authorities would do the same. Factory employers and employees were urged to 'make such arrangement as will best carry out the spirit of the scheme', and pedestrians 'can best co-operate by simply standing still when the signal sounds'.

In 1921, the Cabinet committee in charge of arrangements for the Cenotaph ceremony wanted to improve co-ordination at the beginning of the two minutes silence, and again used the press as its channel of communication. It announced that maroons would be fired on the last stroke of Big Ben at 11 a.m., expecting local authorities to follow this example. It went on to suggest that the press could help further 'by inviting the public to join in the singing of the hymn', which was an innovation that year. This use of unofficial channels to co-ordinate the national observance was deliberate policy, as a letter from a civil servant on the subject to Lord Curzon, who chaired the Cabinet committee, made clear. The writer pointed out that the press had always been used to communicate with local authorities in matters relating to Armistice Day celebrations, rather than official Home Office channels<sup>46</sup>.

The printed word played an extensive part in the commemoration of the war dead. National and local press coverage made Armistice Day a co-ordinated national event, not only by passing on information about its organisation, but also by providing models for others to follow through detailed reports of ceremonies. National and many local papers reported the ceremony held at the Cenotaph every year, allowing their readers to share in it to some extent,

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<sup>46</sup> Public Record Office, HO 45: 11557, file 392664/20



no matter how remote they were from London, and so making it a national focus for the celebration of Armistice day. Papers carried images of the monument on the day. In later years these were sometimes montaged with other images of the war such as marching soldiers<sup>47</sup>, a device also used in films, from which the newspapers may have borrowed it. Through these reports attention could be directed to one point in London as the centre of the country's united act of homage. Radio broadcasting of the ceremony, begun in 1928, merely continued this already established focus.

Some national papers also gave accounts of provincial, even village celebrations of Armistice Day, which extended the sense that every community was sharing in a single commemorative event. Editorials and reports published on 11 November and the immediately following days often included commentaries interpreting the meaning of Armistice Day and its rituals. We shall also see, in the following chapters, how large a part the press played in encouraging and giving practical support to the erection of war memorials.

In 1923 something approaching a private and secular liturgy for Armistice Day was published, entitled Cenotaph: a Book of Remembrance in Poetry and Prose. The editor explained its purpose as 'gathering together some of the utterances made by men and women who found themselves endowed with the supreme gift of interpreting the faith and outlook of the vast mute masses who endured the war'. It contained poems, stories and newspaper extracts reporting great commemorative events such as the unveiling of the Cenotaph and the burial of the Unknown Warrior. It was intended to make possible a communion between individuals on Armistice Day, even in the privacy of their own feelings. Many people, the editor wrote,

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<sup>47</sup> For example: Daily Mail, 11 Nov. 1926; Morning Post, 11 Nov. 1933

have the wish to make the act of homage more complete, less isolated, by sharing the memories of others whose heads are bowed also...The anthology aims in a large measure at pursuing the course along which the mood of the humble celebrant of the Day of Remembrance is likely to travel<sup>48</sup>.

An especially intense style of prose was common to Armistice Day reports, regardless of the character of the newspaper. In 1919 the Daily Mail depicted it thus: 'emotion vibrated from roof to street...till you could scarce see the Cenotaph for the *aura*, the halo, the throbbing air that encompassed it...All the while the sun shone; and there was mystic meaning in that too'<sup>49</sup>. And the Morning Post: 'Many tears were shed, the tears that are spiritual things, the rosary beads of undying remembrance'<sup>50</sup>. In 1930 the Manchester Guardian could be as lyrical about Manchester's own ceremony. 'It is a memorable Silence, if ever there was one.' (It seems that one could become a connoisseur of silences.) 'Only the pagan wind is active, rioting among the flags'. The two minutes of silence were 'all-sufficient. Remembrance is not told in minutes but in tears; resolution needs not time but depth of heart!'<sup>51</sup>

The importance of print as a means of sharing in commemorative acts, and also of colouring readers' perceptions of them, was apparent to contemporaries. The Daily Mail reported two occasions on which clergymen used its own account of the burial of the Unknown Warrior in

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<sup>48</sup> T.Moult (ed), Cenotaph: a Book of Remembrance in Poetry and Prose for November the Eleventh, London, 1923, p.10

<sup>49</sup> Daily Mail 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>50</sup> Morning Post 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>51</sup> Manchester Guardian 12 Nov. 1919



sermons<sup>52</sup>. They had probably done this in order to exploit the vivid and emotional impression created by the language typical of such reports. In a descriptive book about the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle, Ian Hay explained that he intended his description to be a vicarious pilgrimage. He wrote that, 'for the benefit of those who are precluded, by conditions of space and circumstances, from visiting the memorial' he had gone into detail which 'may prove at once superfluous and inadequate to those who have made the pilgrimage themselves'<sup>53</sup>. He wished to recreate the emotional experience for those who could not actually go, and so extend the sense of participating in a national homage to the dead.

## 2. The Organisation of Local War Memorial Committees

The nationwide interweaving of actions, words and objects to commemorate the war dead was composed mainly through local initiative and local organisation. In many places local authorities convened a public ceremony for the two minutes silence on Armistice Day. They organised the signal for the silence and stopped traffic. Where no civic ceremony was organised others might take the responsibility. In 1924 a leader of Southgate Ratepayers' Association noticed that people gathered spontaneously at a road junction in the town centre. He organised services there in the following three years with local clergy officiating<sup>54</sup>.

The erection of memorials was, like ceremonies, usually the result of local initiative and organisation. It was generally expected that every civil community (a place with a statutory local authority - parish, district, town) should

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<sup>52</sup> Daily Mail, 15 Nov. 1920

<sup>53</sup> I. Hay, Their Name Liveth, p.v

<sup>54</sup> Palmers Green Gazette, 18 Mar. 1949, obituary

have a memorial, and the community's official leaders were expected to see to the matter<sup>55</sup>. A Leeds alderman wrote that apart from any national commemorative schemes which might be proposed 'Leeds ought not to overlook the honour due to its men and the need for an adequate local memorial'<sup>56</sup>. A Southgate councillor said that 'it had always seemed to him a blot on Southgate, its not having a suitable war memorial'<sup>57</sup>. The Bradford Daily Telegraph maintained that 'the Bradford public have been growing impatient' that a memorial 'is long overdue' when it launched a shilling fund to pay for one<sup>58</sup>. Hull's Lord Mayor for 1922 'had wondered many times why, like every town and city almost he had visited Hull had no public memorial to those who fell in the War'<sup>59</sup>.

If a community's official leaders did not start the organisation to provide a war memorial, someone else usually did. In 1919 the vicar of Hayton in Cumberland asked the parish council if it intended to initiate the erection of a

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<sup>55</sup> In the immediate post-war years many communities were still in the process of commissioning memorials, and other sites were found for official ceremonies and wreath-laying. In Manchester on Armistice Day 1919 wreaths were placed on the memorial in Saint Ann's Square to those killed in the Boer War. In Edinburgh the old Mercat Cross was used until a city memorial was provided in 1927. In Leith, people continued to assemble at the Queen Victoria statue for an Armistice service. (This statue included a reference to local Boer War casualties.) A delegation from Southgate UDC regularly took a wreath down the road to lay on Wood Green's war memorial until 1929 when the Southgate memorial garden was opened. At Birmingham in 1921 and '22, in the absence of a memorial, the corporation and the local Civic Society co-operated to decorate the exterior of the Town Hall for a ceremony. At Hoylake and Stockport ceremonies were held on what were to become the sites of their memorials.

<sup>56</sup> Leeds Weekly Chronicle, 15 Nov. 1918

<sup>57</sup> Palmer's Green Gazette, 1 Apr. 1922

<sup>58</sup> Bradford Daily Telegraph, 10 Sept. 1921

<sup>59</sup> Hull Daily Mercury, 21 Nov. 1922



war memorial. On being told that it did not, he called a public meeting for the purpose himself<sup>60</sup>. In Hull, where a substantial relief fund had already been established in memory of the dead, but no monument erected, ex-servicemen began agitating for a city cenotaph in 1922<sup>61</sup>. After Sheffield city council had suspended its plan for a city memorial hall because of the post-war recession, the local branch of the British War Graves Association, an organisation for bereaved relatives, began to promote a memorial on its own initiative in 1922<sup>62</sup>.

War memorials were normally erected by local committees whose organisation varied according to the kind of community in which they were formed. Nevertheless, their actions generally conformed to a broad pattern characterised by the opportunity for public participation. The large majority of organisations to be studied here were formed from and served the people of cities, boroughs, urban or rural districts, and parishes. Towns usually confined their organisation to the area governed by their corporations or urban district councils. Villages acted as parishes, observing their local authority boundaries too. This was a convenient arrangement. Local communities defined by these administrative boundaries could look to an obvious official leadership - the mayor, or council chairman, and councillors - to take responsibility for starting a war memorial organisation. The local authority could also provide administrative support and, in large communities, experience of commissioning public buildings of many kinds.

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<sup>60</sup> Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle, PR/102/81, Hayton War Memorial, Minutes, 15 Dec. 1919

<sup>61</sup> Eastern Morning News, 2 Dec. 1922

<sup>62</sup> Sheffield Record Office, CA 653 (18), letter from C.Styring, 30 Sept. 1925

Formerly independent villages or parishes which had been incorporated into major conurbations like Leeds and Bradford sometimes had quite costly memorials of their own. The Bradford wards (and parishes in their own right) of Allerton, Eccleshill and Thornton each had a substantial figurative bronze memorial. These cases seem to contradict the principal that the community for whom a memorial was erected conformed to local government boundaries. However, it seems likely that a strong remnant of the former independent institutional life of these localities remained after their incorporation into larger municipalities, with a matching consciousness of communal independence. A sense of local identity, with organisations to sustain it in practice, probably existed in these Bradford suburbs as strongly as it did at Stanwix, a parish not long incorporated into Carlisle. The chairman of Stanwix war memorial committee said many people 'were not very proud of their association with Carlisle' and 'it would be a disgrace if they did not do something' of their own<sup>63</sup>.

In towns the initiator of the commemorative movement was generally (in a city or borough) the mayor, or (in an urban district) the chairman of the council. These leaders would call an inaugural meeting, at which resolutions to start a fund and establish a memorial committee would be passed. They might act on their personal initiative, or claim to be acting at the insistence of other citizens. In either case it was deemed right ('natural' according to the Hoylake and West Kirby Advertiser<sup>64</sup>) for the officially constituted leadership of the town to take the first step. The inaugural meeting could take the form of a 'Town Meeting'

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<sup>63</sup> Carlisle Journal, 25 July 1919

<sup>64</sup> Hoylake and West Kirby Advertiser, 7 May 1920



open to all citizens<sup>65</sup>, or be called by specific invitation to people and organisations regarded as representative of 'public and social' life in the town<sup>66</sup>. At these meetings committees were formed to choose the type of memorial a community would have and to organise its production. Motions put to the meeting, and perhaps a list of people who should form the committee, would probably have been composed by its organisers in a preliminary private or town council meeting<sup>67</sup>. Even though the memorial was intended to be an expression of popular feeling, the controlling committee's composition and agenda were not left to the spontaneous decision of whichever members of the public chose to attend.

Memorial committees normally had a structure which was intended to make them representative of the local community as whole. The purpose of this arrangement was to encourage all sections of the community to contribute to the memorial and to feel that their views were taken into account in deciding what sort of memorial to erect. A letter to a local Edmonton newspaper explained that, 'in order to be successful all sections of the community should be asked to co-operate and an opportunity given for discussion and suggestions'. The committee should be formed 'from all public organisations. Then, and not until then, will Edmonton succeed in its belated effort to erect a fitting

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<sup>65</sup> Metropolitan Borough of Bethnal Green, Minutes of Proceedings 6 Feb. 1919; Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle, S/UD/M/1/2Z/6 Maryport Town War Memorial Committee, min. 29 Jan. 1919

<sup>66</sup> Metropolitan Borough of Islington, Minutes of Proceedings, 7 Feb. 1919; also West Yorkshire Archives, Bradford, BBC 1/56/4/6 Bradford Corporation Special Committees Minute Book No.4, 25 July 1919

<sup>67</sup> Strathclyde Regional Archive, G4.1, Glasgow War Memorial Committee, min. 26 May 1919, and circular letter 9 June 1919; Metropolitan Borough of Deptford, Minutes of Proceedings, 28 Jan. 1919

memorial to our fallen brothers'<sup>68</sup>. The Barnsley Chronicle believed that Barnsley's 'townspeople will have every reason to be satisfied' because 'at every stage the "vox populi" will be taken fully into account' as a result of the memorial committee's representative nature<sup>69</sup>.

Bethnal Green's executive committee involved representatives of the council, Christian clergy, the synagogue, two benevolent societies, friendly societies, two hospital aid funds, the Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, the Rifle Club and the Special Constables<sup>70</sup>. At Bradford a committee was formed of councillors, nonconformist church bodies, the infirmary, a hospital fund and two other charities, the YMCA, ex-service organisations, the Co-operative Society, Council of Friendly Societies, Chamber of Trade, and Trades and Labour Council<sup>71</sup>. The committee at Barnsley (its second) which finally got a memorial project under way included representatives of eleven local clubs, both middle and working class, Liberal and Labour clubs, regimental and ex-servicemen's associations and seven local churches ranging from Anglican to Baptist and Primitive Methodist<sup>72</sup>. The committee at Maryport contained councillors, clergy, doctors, school heads, bank and works managers, and workmen's representatives from local firms in proportion to the size of their workforces: 1 for 20 staff, 2 for 50, 3 for 100<sup>73</sup>. At Stockport, the committee meetings were held

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<sup>68</sup> Enfield Archives, Edmonton United Services Club, press cuttings

<sup>69</sup> Barnsley Chronicle, 24 July 1920

<sup>70</sup> Tower Hamlets Local Studies Library, Bethnal Green Borough War Memorial Committee, min. 12 Feb. 1919

<sup>71</sup> Bradford, BBC 1/56/4/6, min. 22 Sept. 1919

<sup>72</sup> Barnsley Archives, Town Clerks In Letters, file 35

<sup>73</sup> Carlisle, S/UD/M/1/2Z/6, min. 29 Jan. 1919



in the evenings especially so that working class representatives could attend<sup>74</sup>.

Less conspicuously industrial towns adopted the same form of organisation. Hoylake and West Kirby, two resorts on the Wirral coast which formed a single urban district set up a joint committee containing councillors, the MP, some prominent private citizens, the cinema proprietor, representatives of the local railway company, clergy, doctors, ex-servicemen, and the joint trade union committee of the two towns<sup>75</sup>. Sleaford, a small agricultural town in Lincolnshire, specified 12 councillors, 12 clergy, 15 ratepayers, 18 ladies and 15 ex-servicemen for its committee<sup>76</sup>. At Enfield, a diverse community which included engineering and armaments works, it was a wartime charitable organisation, Enfield Patriotic Committee, which founded the war memorial committee. Doctors, trade union branch presidents, clergy, the Conservative MP, and the former chairman of the Patriotic Committee who was a leading Liberal, were invited to become members<sup>77</sup>.

In some towns, war memorial committees were not socially and politically inclusive. The membership of Islington's committee was confined to councillors, MPs, clergy, some charity heads, and the local Hospital Extension Committee. (One of these charities, Highbury Patriotic Platform was largely working class<sup>78</sup>.) Here 'representative' was taken

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<sup>74</sup> Stockport Archive, B/AA/4, Stockport War Memorial, Minutes, 30 Sept. 1919

<sup>75</sup> Wirral, ZWO/16, min. 20 Dec. 1918

<sup>76</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, SLUDC 11/6, Sleaford War Memorial Committee, min. 30 June 1919

<sup>77</sup> Enfield Gazette, 13 June 1919

<sup>78</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 26 May 1919. 'Patriotic funds' were relief charities for the dependents of volunteer servicemen which had appeared during the Boer War, and possibly in earlier wars.

to mean local persons of note: 'public representatives of the Borough who would most likely form a powerful and influential committee',<sup>79</sup>, yet the importance of public representation in some form was still, thereby, acknowledged.

The basis for organisation of war memorials in villages was the parish, in either its civil or ecclesiastical identity. Parish councils had few powers<sup>80</sup>, as the veteran Hugh Jackson, member of the parish council at Brampton, Cumberland, for twenty five years, pointed out to the annual parish meeting in 1919. Their role, he said, was rather to support activities in aid of 'the welfare and prosperity' of the community<sup>81</sup>. Far more administrative power lay with the rural district councils, but the boundaries of the districts did not match geographical loyalties or social networks. It was to the feeble parish councils, rather than district councils, that country communities usually turned to establish war memorials.

Village memorial projects were often inaugurated at the annual general parish meeting, open to all voters for the election of new councillors. Alternatively, the parish priest called and chaired a parish meeting. (It was quite common for the parson also to be an active and influential member of the parish council.) A local committee was then formed, normally involving the parson and any local landlords active in parish affairs. Farmers, tradesmen and school teachers were also regularly members.

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<sup>79</sup> Metropolitan Borough of Islington, Minutes of Proceedings, 26 May 1919

<sup>80</sup> B.Keith Lucas, The English Local Government Franchise, Oxford 1952, p.42

<sup>81</sup> Carlisle, DX/5/59, Jackson Papers



### 3. Money

Money was the lifeblood of any memorial project and the need to get money was an important influence on the form of organisation adopted by committees. Some committees expressly took a familiar fund-raising organisation as the basis of their operations. The core of Llandrindod Wells war memorial committee was constituted by former members of the town's war relief committee<sup>82</sup>. Harrogate war memorial committee enlisted the expertise of those with experience of wartime fund-raising<sup>83</sup>. Elsewhere, many of the representative bodies included on war memorial committees had experience of raising money for charities, or of donating to charities from their own funds. Contributions from, or benefits organised by clubs, societies and co-operatives had been a familiar part of pre-war fund raising activities.

The collection of money was not just a practical necessity. It was also treated as a means of expression for the citizens at large. For most people, participation in the production of a war memorial took the form of contributions to the memorial fund. The generosity which members of the public could demonstrate by giving had two important symbolic meanings. In the first place, it provided a means by which all members of the public could make a concrete contribution to the production of a war memorial, indicating that it was genuinely a gift from the whole community. The Barnsley Chronicle commented that it was 'in the best sense a popular feature' of Barnsley's war memorial fund 'that everyone is to be given the chance to contribute'. Its purpose was 'not so much to raise a record amount, as to make the memorial really representative of all classes and

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<sup>82</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, letter from Town Clerk to Secretary, War Relief Committee, 11 Jan. 1919

<sup>83</sup> Harrogate Advertiser, 13 Mar. 1920

sections and creeds in the community'<sup>84</sup>. Stockport's memorial fund appeal said that 'every effort should be made and every opportunity given to make this contribution as collective and representative as possible'<sup>85</sup>. Even the smallest gift was an acceptable offering. To Sheffield's fund 'the small gifts of the many' were 'no less welcome than the large gifts of the few'<sup>86</sup>.

In the second place, subscriptions willingly made to a memorial fund showed that the citizens were genuinely grateful to the war dead for their self-sacrifice. The dead, in the words of an appeal at Brampton, Cumberland, had been prepared to give 'the greatest, their lives'<sup>87</sup>, and this imposed on the living an obligation to give, in turn, what they could in recognition of the generosity of the dead. The appeal continued, 'surely where much has been given, much is required'. Gifts to Bethnal Green memorial fund were intended, in the words of an appeal leaflet, 'to show our gratitude' to the dead<sup>88</sup>. The mayor of Stoke Newington appealed to local employers in 1919 'to contribute liberally...so that the memorial may be an adequate expression of the gratitude which all those connected with the borough bear towards the heroic dead, to whom we owe a debt which can never be paid'<sup>89</sup>.

It was widely held that voluntary subscription was the only acceptable way to fund a war memorial. Only willing gifts

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<sup>84</sup> Barnsley Chronicle, 24 July 1920

<sup>85</sup> Stockport, B/AA/4 Appeal leaflet (n.d.)

<sup>86</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (15), appeal leaflet, April 1924

<sup>87</sup> Carlisle, DX/5/59, Brampton and District War Memorial Cottage Hospital, Interim Report, 18 Apr. 1924

<sup>88</sup> Tower Hamlets Local Studies Library, appeal leaflet, March 1920

<sup>89</sup> Hackney Archive, SN/W/1/1, Stoke Newington War Memorial, Minute Book, typescript draft, July 1919



would adequately express recognition of the sacrifice the dead had made. The Hackney and Kingsland Gazette argued that recourse to the rates to fund a war memorial would be 'a very doubtful compliment to our gallant fighters' because the money would not then have been raised as a voluntary gift<sup>90</sup>. The official appeal at Stoke Newington expressed the opinion that 'an enforced tribute, in the shape of an addition to the rates would...be unworthy alike of the Borough and of its heroic dead'<sup>91</sup>. A letter to the Islington Daily Gazette, in favour of extending the local voluntary hospital as the borough war memorial, said 'every brick in the building should have the charm of a voluntary offering, as opposed to the compulsory rate'<sup>92</sup>. The Barnsley Chronicle thought that allowing everyone to contribute to the town's memorial fund set it on a 'truly democratic basis', and would thus 'invest the memorial with a unique grace and significance worthy of the noble-hearted fellows' whom it commemorated<sup>93</sup>.

What constituted voluntary giving was open to argument. Many of the parishioners in a Gloucestershire parish felt that to canvass for donations at all was against the voluntary principle<sup>94</sup>. At the dedication of the memorial cross at Brancepeth, County Durham, the officiating clergyman condemned the use of entertainments to raise money as this did not constitute a 'free gift'<sup>95</sup>. The committee who organised the memorial gift from Bradford Post Office employees to endow a bed in the Royal Infirmary were pleased

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<sup>90</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 28 July 1919

<sup>91</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/8, Circular 7 Aug. 1919

<sup>92</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 30 Sept. 1918

<sup>93</sup> Barnsley Chronicle, 27 July 1920

<sup>94</sup> Gloucestershire Record Office, P 348 VE 2/1, All Saints Viney Hill, Church Parochial Council, min. 10 May 1920

<sup>95</sup> Durham County Advertiser, 10 June 1921

to say that 'the money had been subscribed willingly and had not come from entertainments',<sup>96</sup>.

In general, though, people saw little contradiction between providing fund-raising entertainments and regarding the results as a voluntary gift. At the village of Llanymynech on the border of England and Wales, the local committee voted at its first meeting to erect a village hall as their memorial 'by voluntary subscription'. At the second, they resolved that the ladies be invited to arrange a victory ball to raise money if negotiations for a site for the hall were successful<sup>97</sup>. Hoylake and West Kirby District Council chose the proprietor of the Kingsway Picture House as one of their first co-optees to the war memorial committee<sup>98</sup>. This was probably not because he was noted for his piety or patriotic enthusiasm, but because by 1918 cinemas were an important part of local fund-raising networks<sup>99</sup>. A committee member at Stoke Newington praised the contribution made by local cinemas to their war memorial fund<sup>100</sup>. At Barnsley, brass band concerts in the park, charity balls, collections in cinemas and a benefit match by Barnsley Football Club all helped to swell the fund. Here, a local philanthropist who had sponsored a wartime convalescent home to the tune of nearly £4000 resigned from the war memorial committee because, as he said, 'I cannot associate myself with the method which the committee are using to raise funds',<sup>101</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup> Bradford Daily Telegraph, 19 June 1922

<sup>97</sup> Shropshire Record Office, 1919/1, Llanymynech War Memorial Committee, mins. 16 Jan. 1919 and 23 Jan. 1919

<sup>98</sup> Hoyle and West Kirby Advertiser, 11 Dec. 1918

<sup>99</sup> J. Cox, The English Churches in a Secular Society, Oxford 1982, p.205

<sup>100</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/13, Draft speech

<sup>101</sup> Barnsley, Town Clerk's In Letters, file 35, letter from G.B.Lancaster, 16 Aug. 1922



The only universal agreement was that memorials ought not to be paid for out of a local authority's funds, but there were instances of even that stipulation being abandoned when sufficient funds could not be raised voluntarily. The much delayed war memorial rose garden at Broomfield Park, Southgate, opened in 1929, was paid for out of council funds. Some towns had to find extra funds from special sources when voluntary fund-raising fell short. Sheffield war memorial committee obtained £1500 from the Sheffield Trustees<sup>102</sup> who administered a charity based on property in the city yielding between £6000 and £7000 a year<sup>103</sup>.

Although voluntary giving was the approved way to raise funds, the whole armoury of fund-raising gimmicks was usually required to persuade people to part with their money. The response to appeals for funds could be very disappointing. A member of Stoke Newington memorial committee privately criticised local people of means who had given only 'a guinea or so' because they had 'done the fund positive harm and have shown themselves utterly incapable of grasping how a large sum is to be raised',<sup>104</sup>. Appeals used the language of moral exhortation, local patriotism, personal and institutional rivalry, even self-interest in the evasion of a future sense of guilt. The second appeal for Gloucestershire's county memorial said that if the response were not adequate 'it will appear as if Gloucestershire were unmindful of the gallantry of her sons and ungrateful for the sacrifice which they have made',<sup>105</sup>. The Bradford Daily Telegraph played on the sense of guilt in

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<sup>102</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (1), min. 11 Aug. 1925 and (14/1)

<sup>103</sup> Kelly's Directory of Sheffield and Rotherham, London 1928

<sup>104</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/13, manuscript notes on reverse of subscription list

<sup>105</sup> Gloucestershire, CMS 13, leaflet, County War Memorial, (n.d.)

support of its shilling fund for the city war memorial. It urged readers to contribute soon in order to avoid any regret, when they joined in ceremonies at the monument in future years, that they had 'neglected the opportunity of subscribing',<sup>106</sup>. Workington's appeal maintained that

no one would care to be saddled with a life-long and ever-present regret that he missed the opportunity of doing his share in acknowledging his gratitude to his fellow-townsmen who cheerfully endured unspeakable hardships, and now lie in a soldier's grave<sup>107</sup>.

Subscription lists were published in newspapers, and subscribers encouraged to make sure their names were seen on them. Workington proposed to keep a full list of subscribers in the town hall 'to be handed down from generation to generation',<sup>108</sup> along with, presumably, the odium attached to not being on it. A member of Pudsey war memorial committee confessed to manipulating the publication of subscription lists. The committee had 'followed the policy of only publishing the larger sums at present as a bait for the wait and see what others give people',<sup>109</sup>.

Stoke Newington war memorial committee employed a professional fund-raiser. There and at Deptford public lotteries known as 'silver ballots' were held to augment flagging funds. These were, strictly speaking, illegal and if an objection was made to the police the responsible individual would be prosecuted. The mayors of both places were summonsed and fined. At Deptford, the complaint

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<sup>106</sup> Bradford Daily Telegraph, 10 Sept. 1921

<sup>107</sup> Carlisle, S/MB/Wo/1/3/863, Workington War Memorial, papers, leaflet (n.d.)

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> York City Archives Department, Acc 56, Box 50, Walter Brierley Papers, letter from W.Shackleton, 20 Mar. 1920



against the mayor was made by the local Council of Christian Churches<sup>110</sup>. The possibilities and risks of this form of fund-raising were well-known. As chairman of the Scottish National War Memorial, the Duke of Atholl advised the memorial's fund raiser not to use it, especially as he anticipated great hostility to it from church ministers<sup>111</sup>. Nevertheless, a prize draw was held at Penrith, with a car offered by the dealer at cost price as the prize, and there do not appear to have been any repercussions. In spite of its illegality, the running of a ballot did little to tarnish a mayor's reputation. Deptford Borough Council reaffirmed 'its unabated confidence' in its mayor 'with much enthusiasm' after his prosecution<sup>112</sup>.

The efficiency of local fund-raising systems varied from place to place. Glasgow, a city of about one million people at the time, raised nearly £104,000 for its memorial fund. It was loyally supported by a number of extremely rich donors from the region whose names had also appeared as donors of large sums in the subscription lists of earlier monuments<sup>113</sup>. The patricians of the west of Scotland were a well-disciplined fund-raising body. Leeds, by comparison, a city with almost half that number of inhabitants, raised only some £6000. Barnsley, with a little over 53000 people in 1921 raised around £3000. The district of Hoylake and West Kirby raised nearly £8000 from a population of 17000. These figures do not represent the actual expenditure of the communities in question on war memorials. Many people might have contributed to memorials more local than those for the city or town they lived in, especially church or school

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<sup>110</sup> Kentish Mercury, 18 June 1920

<sup>111</sup> Scottish National War Memorial papers, Bundle 14, letter, 21 Dec. 1921

<sup>112</sup> Kentish Mercury, 18 June 1920

<sup>113</sup> Strathclyde Regional Archives, G4.1, Gladstone, Kelvin and Roberts Memorials

memorials. They reflect, rather, the effectiveness of civic leaders in rallying support for the project they had initiated.

#### 4. Leadership and Power in Local Memorial Committees

The roles played by social leaders in a memorial movement differed between urban and rural communities. In a city or borough it was customary for the lord mayor or mayor, who would normally be *ex-officio* chairman of the war memorial committee, to change annually. This meant that the leading public figure who made appeals for the memorial fund and opened fund-raising events, did not continue for the duration of the memorial-building process. In towns it was common for the administrative co-ordination of a memorial project to be given to the town clerk's department of the local authority. The town clerk would be honorary secretary of the war memorial committee. A local bank manager would probably be honorary treasurer. Town clerks and borough architects or surveyors would have had considerable experience of the business of public building on which the committee could call. Town clerks could deal with the commissioning of war memorials as part of their normal duties. Urban local authorities frequently provided additional resources for a memorial. They gave sites free of charge to the memorial committee and made up foundations at their own expense.

The services provided by a mayor as figurehead for the local memorial committee, and the town clerk's department as its administrative agent, were offered as an official duty incumbent upon the occupants of these positions rather than as a personal one. A few mayors did identify themselves very personally with a particular memorial proposal, but this was an old-fashioned and not very popular approach. The mayor of Stockport offered the personal gift of a park



for the town's memorial, but it was turned down in favour of an art gallery built by general public subscription. The mayor took no further part in the committee's business after his gift was refused<sup>114</sup>. In general mayors simply gave, at most, a substantial donation, and made themselves responsible for raising adequate funds from the community at large. Their personal contributions were models for their social peers to follow, often published at the head of the subscription list. At Stoke Newington the mayor in office in 1918 led the list with a donation of £105 (one hundred guineas - subscriptions from respectable people were often calculated in guineas), and eight of his colleagues followed suit.

The requirement that a memorial should be a collective gift from the community, and the practical requirements of organising a voluntary fund-raising campaign, raised the expectation that leaders of a town memorial committee would not dominate the processes of giving and making decisions too conspicuously themselves, but would allow a large opportunity for public participation. The mayor and local administration offered facilities for the members of a community to make their own memorial. They were not supposed to be making it for them, although, as chapter 4 will show, they could dominate the proceedings in other ways.

In rural war memorial committees, parsons and notable local citizens frequently took the honorary offices more as a personal than as an *ex-officio* duty. Their social and business connections made them the most suitable people to hold these places. Estate owners and their managers had experience of building and of the business of buying and selling land. They knew architects, and sometimes had employees of their own with appropriate skills, such as

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<sup>114</sup> Stockport, B/AA/4, mins. 5 June 1919 and 22 July 1919

masters. They offered these services as part of their contribution to the war memorial, and might also supply materials or a site free if they could. The manager of Lord Boyne's estate at Brancepeth was secretary of the village war memorial committee and had the memorial cross constructed in the estate yard using stone donated by Boyne himself<sup>115</sup>. Lady Howard, who was a member of Greystoke war memorial committee in Cumberland, offered to supply stone and provided a mason for their parish memorial<sup>116</sup>.

Rural social leaders were offering as a personal duty services which would be available from the public authorities of a town but which a parish could not offer. Several of them personally took responsibility for seeing that a local memorial was erected, and made a financial commitment to match. Lord Derwent, a North Riding landowner wrote to his architect, Walter Brierley, 'it's about time we had a parish meeting here to decide on the form a memorial...should take'. He himself proposed an obelisk 'in some conspicuous place'<sup>117</sup>. This was adopted by the parishioners. During its construction the price rose considerably due to the rising price of stone, and Derwent took personal responsibility for making up the difference. 'Of course I must have the memorial for Hackness,' he wrote, when undertaking to pay the increased cost<sup>118</sup>. Katherine Grey, another Yorkshire landowner, took the same personal responsibility for Sutton and Huby war memorial. There was a question of revising its design to make it less expensive. However, the committee 'decided that we should prefer the Cross as originally designed,' wrote Grey, 'only because I

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<sup>115</sup> Durham County Advertiser, 10 June 1921

<sup>116</sup> Carlisle, PR/5/186, Greystoke War Memorial Committee, min. 18 Nov. 1919

<sup>117</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 109, letter from Derwent, 20 Mar. 1919

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 5 Sept. 1920



promised to pay the increase in price. It is hard on me, but I should not like the Cross to be a failure in any way,<sup>119</sup>.

This sense of responsibility was not peculiar to the erection of memorials. It was a feature of the ordinary work of parish councils where sympathetic landlords took an interest in parish affairs, and can be considered part of the regular pattern of rural local politics. The achievements of Brampton parish council which Hugh Jackson listed in 1919 had depended a great deal on the generosity of Lord and Lady Carlisle. The radical Lady Carlisle had been a member of the parish council, and one of its representatives to the rural district<sup>120</sup>. Over the years she and her husband had given footpaths and recreation land to the parish, and his Lordship's influence had been instrumental in obtaining 'a telephone call office' for the village<sup>121</sup>. Thus, in discharging what they felt was a duty to use their personal wealth and facilities in the service of the community, rural social leaders were, like their urban counterparts in a different way, conforming to the expectations normally held of people in their position.

Civic leaders had the duty of seeing that a proper commemoration of the dead was conducted in their communities. Their conception of their roles, and the problems they faced, differed considerably between predominantly rural and predominantly urban communities. The differences were created by the forms of power available to them in town and country. In towns the power of civic leaders was based on the co-operation they established between important interest groups, facilitated by the institutions of local government. In villages it depended

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. letter from Gray to Brierley, 11 June 1920

<sup>120</sup> Carlisle Journal, 2 May 1919

<sup>121</sup> Carlisle, DX/5/59

more on the provision or control of resources by social leaders personally. The nature of public participation, and the share of responsibility taken by groups outside the civic leadership differed accordingly. Nevertheless, in all kinds of communities, the pattern to which the conduct of war memorial committees usually conformed had both symbolic and practical purposes. There were certain principles - the representation of all sections of the community, co-operative effort and voluntary gifts of money - which ought to be enacted in the production of a memorial. Acting in accordance with these principles gave the required meaning and sanctity to the object which was eventually erected.



## Chapter 2

## A Commemorative Tradition and its Application in War

Although some elements in the commemoration of the First World War were new, the way in which it was organised and the form it took continued developments which had occurred in the previous century. It also drew on commemorative practices which had become widespread during the war itself, partly for propaganda purposes and partly as an element in the wartime pastoral work of the Church of England. During the nineteenth century a tradition of national commemorative events had grown up. Its organisation was predominantly local, and combined the efforts of private citizens, voluntary organisations and local authorities. It was financed out of funds raised locally by voluntary bodies under the patronage of civic leaders, and as high a level as possible of public participation was encouraged. Coronations, royal jubilees and deaths were its main occasions. By 1918 the familiarity of such events offered well-established conventions for the organisation of festivities and erection of permanent memorials.

Wars, and the aftermath of wars, had played an important part in the development of the commemorative tradition. In 1809, during the Napoleonic wars, King George III's jubilee was celebrated to raise national morale<sup>1</sup>, and memorials to the King and to military leaders of that period were erected by subscription funds, some of which encouraged the participation of members of the working class<sup>2</sup>. The Boer War of 1899-1902 was commemorated by many monuments to its dead. During the Great War some forms of ceremony and of commemorative object - shrines and monuments - had come into

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<sup>1</sup> See L.Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III', Past and Present, 102, Feb. 1984, pp.94-129

<sup>2</sup> See A.Yarrington, The Commemoration of the Hero, 1800-1864, Monuments to the British Victors of the Napoleonic Wars, London 1988

use in which references to the war dead played an important part.

### 1. Civic Commemorative Organisation before the First World War

The forms of organisation and fund-raising used in the commemoration of the Great War dead were modelled on earlier experience. By Edward VII's reign the local commemoration of events of national importance, organised according to a familiar formula, had become common features of civic life in communities of all sizes. The public meeting to launch a fund and decide what should be done with it, a representative committee to manage the use of the fund, the encouragement of communal unity and the participation of all classes, within a framework provided by the local government system, were common.

Victoria's jubilees in 1887 and 1897 were commemorated largely through local organisation, and this procedure was endorsed by the government. When Lord Randolph Churchill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was questioned in Parliament about the government's intentions for a national celebration of the silver jubilee, he replied that, 'all celebrations of this kind will probably possess greater value in proportion as they arise from the spontaneous action of the people'<sup>3</sup>. Local committees were established, funds raised for celebrations and memorials, and the participation of all classes encouraged. Leeds jubilee committee went to great lengths to include working class organisations formally in the arrangement of the celebrations. It set up a sub-committee 'to consider and consult with the representatives of the working classes as to the best way of carrying out a resolution to organize a

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<sup>3</sup> Parliamentary Debates, third series, v.309, p.1354, 25 Sept. 1886, reply to Mr Lawson.



general rejoicing suitable to the occasion'<sup>4</sup>. Representatives of various trades and benefit societies met the mayor to discuss the question. At a public meeting in Lewisham, in 1897, held to form a committee for the diamond jubilee, the vicar moved 'that all classes of the community be invited to co-operate in this loyal commemoration', which was resolved *nem. con.*<sup>5</sup>.

It was widely felt that creating a memorial, whether an institution or a monument, on such occasions was a civic duty, and that failure to erect one was a slur on the community. One correspondent had declared 'it would be a lasting disgrace' to the parishes of Lewisham and Lee in south London if the diamond jubilee was 'not marked in a suitable and permanent manner'<sup>6</sup>. A speaker at a public meeting in Greenwich thought 'the inhabitants of the Borough would be ashamed if some permanent memorial was not established' to commemorate the jubilee, and was supported by cries of 'hear, hear'<sup>7</sup>. In 1901, after Victoria's death, the mayor of South Shields initiated a movement to erect a memorial to her, and stressed that civic pride required the town to match the performance of other municipalities. He told a public meeting: 'As a community, South Shields should not be behind any other town in the performance of its duty' to commemorate the Queen<sup>8</sup>. He had received an appeal from a committee in London requesting support for a national memorial to her, but he had enquired about the intentions of other towns and 'had found that there was a general desire

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<sup>4</sup> Times, 12 Feb. 1887

<sup>5</sup> Kentish Mercury, 23 Apr. 1897

<sup>6</sup> Kentish Mercury, 4 June 1897

<sup>7</sup> Kentish Mercury, 30 Apr. 1897

<sup>8</sup> Shields Daily Gazette, 17 May 1901

on the part of municipalities throughout the kingdom to have memorials of their own'<sup>9</sup>.

While many memorials were monuments, they could also be utilitarian buildings intended to provide medical, educational or social facilities. One precedent for commemorative endowments of this sort was the ancient tradition of wealthy individuals establishing named charitable funds both as gifts to the communities in which they lived, and as monuments to themselves. Another precedent was the continuing practice of entertaining the elderly, the poor, and children to special meals and festivities on commemorative occasions. Victoria's jubilees had been widely celebrated in this way. This charitable element in commemoration had both symbolic and hard-headed practical value. Many people thought that if money was to be disbursed it should serve a constructive rather than a merely sentimental and decorative purpose. If a memorial could be useful as well as impressive, it would be that much more appreciated. In 1818, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, asked about a monument to victory over the French, told the House of Commons that 'nothing could be more fit than that national monuments should be rendered applicable to purposes of general utility'<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, a charitable memorial also acted as a gesture of social reconciliation, bringing benefits to the entire community, and so reinforced the theme of communal unity in the celebrations.

Concern with utility also extended to improving the appearance and general convenience of the urban environment into which the memorial, whatever it was, would be introduced. Alison Yarrington has pointed out that, in

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Parliamentary Debates, first series, v.37, p.1116, 27 Jan. 1818



provincial monuments to the British heroes of the Napoleonic War, nationalist motives were 'closely linked with the desire to improve the physical aspect of cities and towns, providing central symbols of their citizens' civic pride and patriotism',<sup>11</sup>. The parish of Lewisham proposed to erect a clock tower as a monument to Victoria's diamond jubilee, but had difficulty raising an adequate fund. A writer to the Kentish Mercury thought that there would be more support for it if its site was changed, and if it was combined with a bus shelter, because it would be more useful. 'The latter would be a boon to the whole of the inhabitants,' he wrote, 'for who, in these days of cheap travel, does not occasionally use the omnibus and trams?',<sup>12</sup>.

Memorial committees appealed for contributions from all classes, here too intending to encourage an expression of united communal feeling. Giving money was the essential commemorative act, showing, by its generosity, the community's appreciation of the person commemorated. C.J.Darling, M.P. for Deptford, noted that the resolution to establish a borough jubilee fund in 1897 did not specify a use for it. 'What was desirable', he said, 'was that the fund should be no mean expression of the feeling of that borough',<sup>13</sup>, regardless of its eventual use. It was therefore open to memorial committees to choose as their memorial whatever they thought would best arouse public generosity. The Kentish Mercury urged in 1887 that an endowment fund for the local voluntary hospital in Greenwich and for the Royal Kent Dispensary would be an ideal jubilee memorial because they were institutions about whose value

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<sup>11</sup> A.Yarrington, The Commemoration of the Hero, p.326

<sup>12</sup> Kentish Mercury, 4 June 1897

<sup>13</sup> Kentish Mercury, 2 Apr. 1897

all sections of opinion could agree, and to which all classes could be expected to contribute<sup>14</sup>.

A working men's jubilee fund for the parishes of Greenwich, Deptford and Lewisham was set up in 1897 to support the hospital, because it was thought of as a facility specially used by the working class (the working class, said the Kentish Mercury, 'more than any other derives benefit from the existence and operations of the hospital')<sup>15</sup>. The mayor of South Shields sought the participation of all classes in the town's Victoria memorial, and called a special meeting of representatives of working class organisations to arrange the raising of subscriptions from them<sup>16</sup>. Glasgow's Gladstone memorial committee enlisted trade unions, friendly societies and co-operative societies in support of their fund in 1899<sup>17</sup>.

After the Boer War, local people who had been killed in South Africa were commemorated on public memorials in many towns. The arrangements for late Victorian and Edwardian festivals of state were often followed, although the lead was not necessarily taken by the local authority. Frequently, Boer War memorials in large towns were in fact county memorials dedicated to the dead of the county regiment and its associated volunteer units. The movement set up to erect these memorials was often under the formal leadership of the Lord Lieutenant, and appealed to the county rather than the municipality as its constituency. The Northumberland county memorial was paid for out of surplus funds still held, after the war, by a local committee formed originally to raise

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<sup>14</sup> Kentish Mercury, 1 July 1887

<sup>15</sup> Kentish Mercury, 11 June 1897

<sup>16</sup> Tyne and Wear Archives Service, T95/93, County Borough of South Shields, Queen Victoria Memorial, min. 11 June 1901

<sup>17</sup> Strathclyde, G4.1, Gladstone Memorial, mins. 21 Feb. 1899, 26 Feb. 1899, 14 Mar. 1899



volunteers for the Imperial Yeomanry in 1899<sup>18</sup>. Commercial concerns, for example the Midland Railway at Derby and the London Stock Exchange, also erected memorials to their members who had died in South Africa.

The Boer War had involved the civilian population of Britain to an unusual degree. It had been extensively reported in newspapers. It had given rise, especially during a week of catastrophic British defeats in December 1899, to widespread anxiety about the security of the Empire, and even of Britain itself. Some fears were raised of an attack on Britain by the European powers. At the unveiling of the Northumberland Boer War memorial in 1908, the Lord Mayor of Newcastle reminded his audience of 'that terrible time...when our hearts were sick with fear, and a black and ominous cloud hung over us, and we dreaded from hour to hour the news which might come'<sup>19</sup>. About two hundred thousand recruits were raised in response to this crisis during January and February 1900<sup>20</sup>. In addition to the regular army, a popular volunteering movement was started. Fifty four thousand volunteers joined the imperial forces in South Africa in the course of the war to serve in special volunteer units such as London's City Imperial Volunteers, some fourteen hundred men<sup>21</sup>. Around twenty thousand British personnel died, the vast majority of them from disease, and the losses were keenly felt. On the occasion of the unveiling of Yorkshire's county memorial to the Boer

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<sup>18</sup> Proceedings of the Council of the City of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, min. 22 Mar. 1905, p.353

<sup>19</sup> Newcastle City Libraries, press cuttings, no title or date

<sup>20</sup> E.Halévy, Halévy's History of the English people in the Nineteenth Century, v.5, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour (1895-1905), London 1961, p.93

<sup>21</sup> See R.Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class, Working Class Reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902, London 1972

War dead in 1905, the Yorkshire Herald remarked, 'It is an unprecedented circumstance in the modern military annals of the country that one county should lose as many as 1459 of its sons in a single campaign',<sup>22</sup>.

Commemorating the Boer War dead was considered a popular cause and the appeals for funds were made to all classes. In 1900 the Lords Lieutenant of the three Ridings of Yorkshire formed a committee with the C-in-C North Eastern Command to raise a memorial to the Boer War dead of the county. They resolved that 'all classes be invited to subscribe in order that the proposed monument should be a fitting testament to the memory of our soldiers and sailors',<sup>23</sup>. When Lord Granby launched the appeal for Leicestershire's Boer War memorial at Leicester, he hoped 'the small subscribers...would be numerous, in order that the whole county and borough, rich or poor, may participate',<sup>24</sup>.

There was no annual ceremony of remembrance comparable to Armistice Day to commemorate the Boer War. There were, however, regular anniversary dinners to celebrate the reliefs of Ladysmith and Mafeking<sup>25</sup>. There was sufficient awareness of 'Ladysmith Day' in Leicester for Lord Granby to propose it as an appropriate time for the churches to take a collection in support of the county Boer War memorial at their Sunday services<sup>26</sup>. At Liverpool, an annual ceremony was instituted in 1907, but this was rare if not unique. It was held at the memorial (erected the previous year) in

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<sup>22</sup> Yorkshire Herald, 4 Aug. 1905

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Leicester Mercury, 12 Jan. 1903

<sup>25</sup> Liverpool Echo, 1 Mar. 1906, 28 Feb. 1908; Daily Mail, 18 May 1909

<sup>26</sup> Leicester Mercury, 12 Jan. 1903



Saint John's Gardens which commemorates not so much the Boer War dead as the entire history of the King's Liverpool Regiment, which had taken part in the defence of Ladysmith. The memorial was decorated for Ladysmith Day by men of the regiment, with the approval of the Lord Mayor. Wreaths were placed there by relatives of soldiers who had died in the war, but on the first occasion there was no formal parade. The Liverpool Echo reported: 'The demonstration was the more significant seeing that all present had been drawn together without formal invitation, and with a general desire to honour the memory of men who had gallantly died for their country on far off fields of war'<sup>27</sup>. In subsequent years there was a march past the memorial and a church service for men of the regiment<sup>28</sup>.

## 2. Home Front Morale and the Commemoration of the War Dead 1914-1918

During the First World War, commemorative ceremonies and objects, partly or exclusively concerned with the war dead became widespread and popular. Mass open air rallies and church services were held, and ephemeral or permanent memorials of various kinds were erected. References to those who had been killed had a prominent place in them, in prayers, tributes of flowers, inscriptions and images. The commemoration of the dead was often combined with prayers for the safety of the living and with the promotion of patriotic sentiments. Rolls of honour in places of work, churches or public spaces carried the names of local people on active service and those killed, and were expected to encourage patriotic devotion generally as well as respect for the individuals named on them. Remembering and honouring the dead was intended to provide some relief for

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<sup>27</sup> Liverpool Echo, 28 Feb. 1907

<sup>28</sup> Liverpool Echo, 28 Feb. 1910

the feelings of the bereaved, and some encouragement to them, but it also made an important contribution to the home front propaganda offensive.

On each anniversary of the outbreak of war, 4 August, large patriotic rallies were held. This day became known as 'Remembrance Day',<sup>29</sup> until it was superseded in 1919 by 11 November. The first anniversary ceremony in Portsmouth was allegedly attended by a hundred thousand people. The crowd declared its 'inflexible determination to continue to a victorious end the struggle in maintenance of those ideals of Liberty and Justice which are the common and sacred cause of the allies'. In 1918 the same ceremony was conducted including the words 'silently paying tribute to the Empire's sons who have fallen in the fight for freedom on the scattered battlefields of the world war',<sup>30</sup>.

Existing religious or patriotic festivals were given a reference to the war dead. Hackney parish church added a commemorative element to its evening service for Easter 1916. The names of local men who had been killed were read from the altar steps, the Last Post was sounded, a guard of honour presented arms, and a procession was formed carrying a wreath of laurel and lilies along with allied flags<sup>31</sup>. The Empire Day celebrations that year at Gayhurst Road School, Hackney, included a pageant in which children carried shields inscribed with the names of dead and wounded old pupils<sup>32</sup>. The Navy League organised a service at Saint Martin in the Fields church for Trafalgar Day in October 1916, to be followed by the laying of wreaths at Nelson's

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<sup>29</sup> Times, 5 Aug. 1918

<sup>30</sup> W.G.Gates (ed), Portsmouth in the Great War, Portsmouth 1919, p.124

<sup>31</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 28 Apr. 1916

<sup>32</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 29 May 1916



Column in memory of officers and men killed in the Battle of Jutland<sup>33</sup>.

Commemorative rolls of honour and, later, religious shrines came increasingly into use. Rolls of honour were lists compiled by communities or institutions naming their members who had joined the forces. They had been used as part of the recruiting campaigns of 1914 and 1915. In September 1914, Walter Long M.P., who was also a Wiltshire land owner, held a public meeting in the village of West Ashton at which he exhorted local men to join up rather than 'live at home in ease, a craven at heart'. He told them that 'here in this village, and in other villages where I have influence I mean to have a great placard headed the roll of honour. On that will be inscribed the names of any man who joins the Colours; a copy of it will be sent to every house or cottage in which he has dwelt, and where his family are, and a permanent copy will be given to his family to keep as a lasting record of the fact that he did his duty'<sup>34</sup>.

The village school at Wyke Regis, Dorset, announced in October that it had a roll of honour with the names of seventy four servicemen, and added: 'Now is the time for old scholars of eligible age and good health to fall in without delay...and swell the Roll of Honour to a hundred names'<sup>35</sup>. Around February 1915 a County of Bute Roll of Honour was published, saying: 'Some day you will want a share in the joy and honour of *victory*. You don't want to be out of it at the end; you can only avoid that by being *in it* now'<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Evening News, 3 Oct. 1916

<sup>34</sup> Wiltshire Gazette, 3 Sept. 1914, quoted in P.Horn, Rural Life in England in the First World War, New York 1984, p.29

<sup>35</sup> Dorset County Chronicle, 8 Oct. 1914, quoted in P.Horn, Rural Life, p.169

<sup>36</sup> Imperial War Museum, Department of Printed Books, box of recruiting leaflets.

In June 1915 Country Life reported that the names of local volunteers were being recorded in rolls of honour at parish churches, and that this encouraged enlistment<sup>37</sup>.

Permanent memorials in stone, not, at this stage, to the dead, were also conceived as aids to recruitment. Stone crosses were awarded in 1915 to the villages of Knowlton, Kent, Dalderby, Lincolnshire, and Barrow-on-Trent, Derbyshire, as prizes for having the highest proportion in their counties of eligible men enlisted. The competitions were run by various institutions. At Knowlton the prize-giver was the local Weekly Dispatch<sup>38</sup>. At Barrow it was Mr F.C.Arkwright, later a deputy lieutenant of the county<sup>39</sup>, and at Dalderby the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce. The sculpted head of the Dalderby cross was donated by A.J. Tuttell, head of a Lincoln firm of masons, and a member of the local Chamber of Commerce council to whom 'the inception of the idea' was credited<sup>40</sup>. J.M.Harrison, a builder who donated the base of the cross, was also a member of the Chamber's council<sup>41</sup>. The rest of the cost was paid by voluntary subscription amongst other Chamber of Commerce members. The recruiting competition was announced in mid-April 1915, 'as a stimulus to recruiting during the next few weeks'<sup>42</sup>, and the prize cross finally unveiled in October 1916.

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<sup>37</sup> Country Life, v.37, n.962, 12 June 1915, p.792

<sup>38</sup> D.Boorman, At the Going down of the Sun, p.55

<sup>39</sup> Church Times, 12 Nov. 1920

<sup>40</sup> Lincolnshire Chronicle, 17 Oct. 1916

<sup>41</sup> Lincoln Incorporated Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1915, p.13

<sup>42</sup> Lincolnshire, Scrivelsby with Dalderby: par. 8/1, circular 13 Apr. 1915



Death intruded increasingly into public memorials and shrines. The London County Council had the first part of its roll of honour of staff killed in the war on sale in April 1915. (The proceeds may have gone to a relief fund.) In April 1916 a monument at Liverpool pierhead to ships engineers who had been killed was completed, erected by a committee of which Lord Derby was chairman<sup>43</sup>. On 4 August 1916, a stone cross commemorating Lord Kitchener, recently killed at sea, John Cornwell, the Jutland hero, and dead soldiers of Bishopsgate and the Honourable Artillery Company was unveiled at Saint Botolph's church, Bishopsgate, in the City of London<sup>44</sup>. Bermondsey Liberal association unveiled its roll of honour in April 1917. On this occasion the association instituted a modest act of remembrance - setting aside 'a few moments' at each meeting to concentrate on the war and those serving in it. The assembled members stood in honour of those on active service, and the chairman read a 'rubric holding in reverence the memory of those who have fallen in the war for liberty, sympathising with the wounded and sick, recognising sacrifice, praying for the safety of those who were well and confidently looking forward for [sic] a triumphant and final victory which will secure the enduring peace of the whole civilised world'<sup>45</sup>.

The idea of publicly commemorating all local soldiers, either currently serving or now dead, was taken up by town councils. In October 1916, Hackney proposed a temporary memorial. Stoke Newington's mayor was discussing a comprehensive roll of honour for the borough in January

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<sup>43</sup> Liverpool Record Office, Derby Papers, 920 DER (17) 10/1, correspondence relating to Engine Room Heroes' Memorial. The monument is discussed in chapter 6 below, p.177.

<sup>44</sup> City Press, 5 Aug. 1916

<sup>45</sup> Southwark Local Studies Library, untitled press cutting, 6 Apr. 1917

1917<sup>46</sup>. Rolls of honour displayed in prominent places were subsequently adapted to record distinctions won by the servicemen whose names appeared on them, and deaths amongst them. Meanwhile, Anglican clergy had started a movement to erect simple and cheap shrines in streets, dedicated to inhabitants who were in the services, with a special place for the names of any who had been killed. The clergy intended their parishioners to participate in the production and care of the shrines, and subsequently held regular short services of intercession and remembrance at them, processing around the parish to them with their choirs and collecting a congregation as they went. Shrines were first put up in working class streets in the parish of Saint John of Jerusalem, South Hackney in (probably) April 1916<sup>47</sup>. The idea had occurred to the rector that Easter<sup>48</sup>. At the London diocesan Conference in May Bishop Winnington-Ingram described the pioneering shrines and commended the idea to his clergy. 'Don't be satisfied with your roll of honour in church, go into the streets and make them understand', he said<sup>49</sup>.

The movement to erect street shrines was particularly favoured by the more Catholic-inclined members of the Church of England, a group to which the Bishop of London belonged. The idea and its intention followed a pattern of missionary initiatives aimed by high Anglicans at the metropolitan poor through the settlement and other socially engaged movements for several decades past. Clergy from less ritualist sections of the Church were sometimes suspicious of them, believing that they furthered a tendency to adopt Catholic religious practices which was growing in strength amongst

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<sup>46</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 20 Oct. 1916 and 5 Jan. 1917

<sup>47</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 11 Aug. 1916

<sup>48</sup> Church Family Newspaper, 18 Aug. 1916

<sup>49</sup> Church Times, 19 May 1916



Anglicans during the war. Prayer for the dead and prayer before the reserved sacrament became far more common and far more acceptable in Anglican churches than they had been before the war, although they continued to arouse hostility<sup>50</sup>. A parish priest, dedicating a shrine in Lambeth, hinted at his own reservations when he 'expressed the hope that it would not be regarded in any superstitious sense'<sup>51</sup>. But the movement soon became accepted even amongst Non-conformists, one of whom wrote to a local paper in Hackney to defend street shrines and public intercessionary prayer for soldiers at the front against criticism from extreme Protestants<sup>52</sup>.

The earliest shrines were improvised from cheap materials by clergy and their parishioners (ill.1). Hackney's first street shrines consisted of lists of all the men from a street who had joined up, written on 'framed parchments' (more likely, pieces of paper or card) 'surmounted by a wooden cross'<sup>53</sup> with a prayer beneath 'which the people were asked to learn and to say daily'<sup>54</sup>. Vases of flowers were placed on either side. In Saint Pancras two contrasting shrines were recorded. One of them consisted of 'a cheap oblong frame of oak' containing two cards which listed 'The Roll of Honour' and 'The Heroic Dead', lettered 'in the vicar's delicate hand'. On one side was a union jack and on the other 'a picture of Christ supporting a soldier pale from the agony of his wounds' (probably a print or magazine illustration). There were finally 'a few chrysanthemums in a couple of cheap tin brackets'. The

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<sup>50</sup> A.Wilkinson, The Church of England and the First World War, London 1978, pp.176-178

<sup>51</sup> Southwark, untitled press cutting, 29 Dec. 1916

<sup>52</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 4 May 1917, letter from 'Highbury New Park Resident'

<sup>53</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 11 Aug. 1916

<sup>54</sup> Church Times, 19 May 1916

other shrine stood on the pavement in front of the area-railings of a row of houses. 'The base of the shrine is an old kitchen table, on which there is a cloth of red twill and an apron of decorated plush stuff' with 'God Bless Our King in gilt embroidery'. A frame contained lists of the servicemen and of the dead. 'Two green flags with the Irish harp in yellow, are entwined with Union Jacks, and all about the frames are flowers....at the base of the table a score of evergreens in pots, and red, white and blue tissue paper'. There were photographs of Kitchener, Jellicoe and Sir John French. 'Robinson V.C. smiles out of the smother of chrysanthemums. And near these great men, modestly put to the side...photographs of the local heroes - laughing Tommies, smoking and in their shirt sleeves'<sup>55</sup>.

By August 1916 a cheap shrine was available commercially, consisting of a tripartite frame to contain lists of names and pictures, with a horizontal board above it to carry flags on short staffs, and flower-holders at each end. The design was patented by Mr T.A.Hand of Longton, Staffordshire, and retailed at 6s 6d each (postage and packing extra)<sup>56</sup>. A leading firm of monumental masons was advertising professionally-made shrines in December 1916<sup>57</sup>. As the war progressed the commercially available products became more elaborate and costly. Models were offered consisting of ornamental cabinet-work and lettering, sometimes containing cast bronze crucifixes<sup>58</sup> (ill.2).

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<sup>55</sup> Evening News, 4 Oct. 1916

<sup>56</sup> The Challenge, 28 July 1916

<sup>57</sup> Church Family Newspaper, 22 Dec. 1916, advertisement for G.Maile and Son

<sup>58</sup> Durham County Record Office, D/Br/E 45(9), Brancepeth Ecclesiastical Parish, Correspondence and Papers Relating to Parish War Memorial, Catalogue from G.Maile and Son, 1917; Clwyd Record Office, Hawarden, P/45/1/379, Northop Parish Church, War Memorial Tablet, Catalogue from J.Wippell and Co.



Street shrines were promoted by the Church of England in conjunction with other public outdoor activities especially concerned with the war; the high point of these activities being the National Mission of Repentance and Hope, launched officially in the autumn of 1916. The Mission consisted of a drive to reach a wider public, and to arouse interest in religious practice and ideas, in connection with the war. It included speaking tours by well-known preachers, such as the Bishop of London, and intensified parochial activity involving the lay members of local congregations. Alan Wilkinson has described the Mission as:

an attempt by the Church of England to respond to the spiritual needs of the nation; an attempt to discharge its sense of vocation to act as the Christian conscience of the nation. It was also intended as a powerful reply to those (including Horatio Bottomley [the chauvinistic editor of John Bull]) who argued that the Church of England was not rising to the needs of the hour.<sup>59</sup>

The previous nine months had been filled with preparatory work and publicity for the Mission, in which shrine-making played a part. Already, at new year 1916, the Church had held three days of intercession, in which 'a real effort was made to bring home to people the spiritual issues on which victory or disaster depend', and 'solemn open-air processions...were a feature of the devotions in many parishes'. The vicar of south Hackney was one of those who held a procession around his parish. 'In the principal streets the names of those who had gone out from each street were read out and they were commended to God in prayer'. He distributed prayer cards at a subsequent church service to all whose interest had been aroused, with the intention of

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<sup>59</sup> A. Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.70

forming 'a league of prayer' for the parish<sup>60</sup>. Informal organisation of this sort probably mobilised the supporters necessary to get the movement to erect war shrines under way.

The street shrines spread rapidly throughout the country from mid-1916. Although they were obviously popular, they ought not to be seen, as Wilkinson and E.S.Turner have suggested, as an essentially spontaneous phenomenon<sup>61</sup>. They originated with the Church of England's wartime evangelism and continued to be promoted very largely by the clergy and church workers, with support later from the newspaper press and other commercial organisations. Early reports acknowledged that the beginnings of the shrine movement were not spontaneous. 'All the breezy persuasion of the clergy was needed to bring the parishioners to see shrines as the right thing', said the Evening News, because the British were 'a shy and secret race' and the emotionality of the shrines 'came oddly' to them<sup>62</sup>. Nor was their propagation left to spontaneous popular action. At South Hackney, one of the curates had specific responsibility for organising the street shrines. In August 1916, four months after the movement started, he was still charged with 'the principal work of organisation' in connection with the shrines. In October clergy elsewhere were 'encouraging their people to compile lists of the men who have gone out and to erect and maintain shrines of their own'<sup>63</sup>. In November the vicar of Christ Church, Swansea, was 'arranging' local street shrines<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Church Times, 7 Jan. 1916

<sup>61</sup> A.Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.67; E.S.Turner, Dear Old Blighty, London 1980, p.135

<sup>62</sup> Evening News, 4 Oct. 1916

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Church Family Newspaper, 17 Nov. 1916



The usefulness of the shrines in the programme of the National Mission of Repentance and Hope was described by the vicar of Longton, Staffordshire. He wrote:

the shrine is made the centre from which our women and girls, divided into groups of eight or ten each, under a leader, ask if they may come and hold a prayer meeting in the cottages whence the lads have gone.

These groups later returned to the parish church 'bringing with them as many "outsiders" as possible' for a service of intercession. 'Such prayer meetings conducted by the laity alone are of immense value, if only to the workers themselves, teaching them their priesthood, and how to make the church a real house of prayer',<sup>65</sup>. The exercise thus served two important goals of the National Mission: to draw in new church members and to renew and enliven the commitment of existing members.

Initially, the emphasis in public services of intercession, and in the words and imagery of the shrines, was on the well-being of soldiers at the front, but deaths inevitably attracted increasing attention. This offered the clergy another way of communicating Christian ideas. The vicar of Longton explained that when a man from the street already listed on the shrine was reported killed, his name was

solemnly transferred across the thin black line separating the living from the dead. Still there on the shrine, still in the great family of God, still to be prayed for! What an opportunity for teaching the great doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

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<sup>65</sup> 'War Shrines and the National Mission', The Challenge, 28 July 1916

This 'simple action' was more comprehensible than sermons on the subject, he thought, and 'you get people there whom you seldom, if ever, get in Church'<sup>66</sup>.

Hackney's war shrines first came to general public notice when Queen Mary made an informal visit to them in August 1916. Their existence was reported in local and national newspapers, and further royal visits attracted attention elsewhere. In October, the Evening News decided to raise a fund to provide materials for shrines in poor areas, and rallied influential and wealthy support for the movement<sup>67</sup>. The Lord Mayor of London and the mayors of Battersea, Holborn and Hackney expressed their support for the paper's initiative, and Selfridges offered to pay for all shrines erected within a mile of the shop. Clergy of several denominations asked the paper for assistance with their local shrines<sup>68</sup>.

The Evening News proposed to select a few sites 'in conjunction with the clergy and others concerned' for shrines to be erected under its patronage. It commissioned a design from the architects Bodley and Hare for a wooden structure (ill.3) consisting of a frame containing a cross, with doors which, when opened, revealed the roll of honour on their inner faces. A low pediment at the top carried allied flags, and a ledge was provided at the bottom for vases of flowers. As inscriptions, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' and 'For God, King and country' were suggested. Other artists and architects submitted designs speculatively, and the paper encouraged more to do so.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Evening News, 4 Oct. 1916

<sup>68</sup> Evening News, 6 and 7 Oct. 1916

<sup>69</sup> Evening News, 9 Oct. 1916



However contrived their origin may have been, street shrines were supposed to be an expression of the public's desire to honour and support those of its members who had gone to fight in the war, and great emphasis was laid on the part ordinary residents should play in making and caring for them. When the Evening News intervened in the shrine movement it insisted that popular initiative and participation should be in the foreground. The original idea, it claimed, had been 'the outcome of a truly religious and patriotic spirit in certain poor neighbourhoods... There is no wish on our part for a scheme which will dot London with shrines in which those who are most deeply interested will feel they have little part. The idea is to aid where aid is really needed, not to originate, and the more that the inhabitants of a street can do by themselves the better we shall be pleased'<sup>70</sup>. Clergy, too, spoke of shrines in this way. A shrine in Well Street, Paignton, 'comes from the people themselves', said a letter from the parson to the Church Times<sup>71</sup>.

Local people certainly did participate in making and looking after shrines. In the parish of Saint Peter's, Regent Square, London, inhabitants of the streets with shrines had contributed 2d each towards them. In Pimlico, the shrine at Ross Street 'was made by a soldier boy discharged paralysed owing to shrapnel in the head'. Ranelagh Grove shrine was given by a builder whose sons' names were on it. Ebury Street shrine was made by a policeman and a local boy<sup>72</sup>. A shrine at Clapton was made by a policeman whose son had been wounded<sup>73</sup>. Some Islington people were reported:

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<sup>70</sup> Evening News, 6 Oct. 1916

<sup>71</sup> Church Times, 10 Nov. 1916

<sup>72</sup> Daily Mail, 4 Oct. 1916

<sup>73</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 15 Dec. 1916

to have thought proper to place a miniature shrine outside their place of residence... In some cases it may satisfy the family's desire to do honour to the dead members of it who have fallen in the great fight...<sup>74</sup>

Shrines were widely held in respect. As evidence of this, the Hackney Gazette pointed out that 'although thefts of flowers in the East End are somewhat common' none of those used to decorate street shrines had been stolen<sup>75</sup>. The mayor of Hackney told the Evening News that the street shrines 'awake a good deal of latent religious feeling. The roughest treat them with respect and take their hats off as they pass them'<sup>76</sup>. Men and boys of Longton also raised their hats<sup>77</sup>.

Services held to dedicate the shrines could attract substantial crowds. A procession held in Stoke Newington to dedicate five street shrines attracted several hundred people in Hawksley and Woodlea Roads, small residential streets near the parish church<sup>78</sup>. The dedication of a shrine in Mapledene Road, Dalston, was a formal event, with Volunteers parading, and attracted nearly a thousand people<sup>79</sup>. At other times people might make purely private and unceremonial use of shrines. The Daily Mail gave an example from Fulham, London: 'Here in the pouring rain yesterday a woman stood with folded hands. "You would never

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<sup>74</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 1 Nov. 1918

<sup>75</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 11 Aug. 1916

<sup>76</sup> Evening News, 7 Oct. 1916

<sup>77</sup> The Challenge, 28 July 1916

<sup>78</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 18 Aug. 1916

<sup>79</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 15 Dec. 1916



think what this means to me," she said. "Just to read the names of my boys helps me along...".<sup>80</sup>

In spite of the public's apparent enthusiasm for shrines, promoters and supporters of the campaign to erect them felt that organisation was indispensable. Lady Muir Mackenzie suggested, in the Evening News, the formation of committees of women in each street to look after the shrines. She wrote:

That is what we want - the residents in each street to look after their own shrines. As we have said, our part in the matter is to lend our organisation and to raise money to put up the shrines<sup>81</sup>.

It is not clear what part the residents of Well Street, Paignton, actually played in erecting their shrine, which, it was reported, had been 'aided by some kind friends'<sup>82</sup>. Its lengthy inscription was adapted from Winchester College's memorial to old boys killed in the Crimean War - unlikely to have been familiar to the residents of the working-class court in Devon where the shrine stood.

As newspapers actively supported the street shrines movement, there must be a suspicion that they overemphasised the public interest in this worthy and patriotic activity. However, the rough treatment given to people who objected to them suggests that there was substantial public support for them. The recorded opposition to war shrines had religious motives, being aimed at supposedly Catholic connotations in their imagery, most especially the crucifixes which occasionally appeared, and in the religious acts associated

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<sup>80</sup> Daily Mail, 4 Oct. 1916

<sup>81</sup> Evening News, 6 Oct. 1916

<sup>82</sup> Church Times, 10 Nov. 1916; see above p.78

with them. Objectors did not necessarily oppose the public display of simple rolls of honour<sup>83</sup>, although one opponent, while religiously motivated in the main, had a more general objection: 'War shrines, even without crucifixes, are no credit to our heroes or our boroughs, with dirty torn flags and empty jars or dead flowers'<sup>84</sup>. The collusion of the press in the shrine movement was attacked by a serving officer, who wrote that there were 'many who view with extreme alarm the seductive effort that is now being made at home by a certain portion of the mammon Press to "spiritualise" the nation into blindness' and out of 'the manly faith of true Protestantism'. This 'octopus of journalism' had revealed itself as 'the friend of superstition and priestcraft'<sup>85</sup>.

In April 1917, the controversial anti-Catholic Reverend J.A.Kensit preached a sermon against war shrines at the Raleigh Memorial Church, Stoke Newington, in what had been advertised as 'a real patriotic protest against the memory of our brave soldiers and sailors being insulted by the idolaters of ritualism'<sup>86</sup>. After the meeting he was attacked by a waiting crowd, alleged to have consisted of about fifty women and boys. He was severely bruised, and his hat, coat, umbrella and briefcase were taken. His attackers also assaulted the conductress of the bus he was trying to catch and spat on a ticket inspector<sup>87</sup>. The Hackney Recorder, whose partiality in the matter is clear from its language, described the perpetrators as: 'Angry women, whose loved ones have gone forth to the present awful conflict, many alas! never to return; and lads old enough to

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<sup>83</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 27 Apr. 1917

<sup>84</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 11 May 1917

<sup>85</sup> Church Family Newspaper, 10 Nov. 1916

<sup>86</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 27 Apr. 1917

<sup>87</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 11 May 1917



appreciate the situation and reverence the monuments at their street corners,<sup>88</sup>.

Why Kensit was so roughly handled is hard to judge. Sectarian violence of this sort might more normally be expected against Catholics or ritualist Anglicans than against an anti-Catholic like Kensit. While it is improbable that members of the crowd were, in principle, full of zeal for the ritualist wing of the Church of England, it is possible that they were acting out of a sense of personal loyalty to a popular high-church parish priest<sup>89</sup>. Alternatively, their behaviour is not unlike that meted out to many London residents of German origin at critical moments during the war. It may have been motivated by the same kind of nationalist hysteria.

It may also have been motivated by attachment to the war shrines as bringers of luck, in this case to friends and relatives serving in the war. Jeffrey Cox has noted that, in the late nineteenth century, new year watchnight services and harvest festivals were popular with urban working-class residents of Lambeth who otherwise showed little interest in Christian religious practice, not even the central festivals of Christmas and Easter. The occasions which interested them were those relating to the cycle of the year and the supply of life's physical necessities. Cox argues that attending church for these celebrations was an invocation of good luck against the uncertainties of life in a poor community. Working class women also kept up the practice of 'churching' after childbirth for the same reason<sup>90</sup>. In the context of such attitudes, a condemnation of street shrines

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<sup>88</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 4 May 1917

<sup>89</sup> I am grateful to Dr Gerald Parsons for a discussion on this point.

<sup>90</sup> J.Cox, The English Churches, p.103

might have been interpreted as hostility to the safety of the servicemen themselves.

This seems all the more likely when we note that the anxiety of families and friends for those at the front, and the anxiety of service personnel themselves, led to an increased interest in religious practices which might contribute to their safety. Rural clergy in Oxfordshire noticed an increase in attendance at church, especially amongst women whose husbands were on active service, and the return of lapsed communicants. One noted that people were finding help in intercessory prayer, and that soldiers had written from the front thanking the congregation for their prayers and urging them to continue<sup>91</sup>. There is, then, good reason to accept the Daily Mail's report that the war shrines in the parish of Saint Barnabas, Pimlico, were 'suggested by men at the front, who wrote home about the wayside crosses they had seen', and that when home on leave 'they are pleased to observe how constantly they are borne in mind and prayed for'<sup>92</sup>. The Hackney Gazette also reported that 'letters written home by the men themselves show how much they personally appreciate these acts of thoughtfulness and devotion'<sup>93</sup>.

The street shrine movement was especially intended to address women. An editorial in the Evening News maintained that shrines 'will be the care of the women whose men's names are inscribed thereon'<sup>94</sup>. At Longton it was the women and girls of the parish who held prayer meetings in the homes of mothers or wives of absent servicemen. Although workplaces and public institutions had their rolls

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<sup>91</sup> Diocese of Oxon Clergy Visitation Returns, 1918, MS Oxf. Dioc Pp.c. 378, 379, quoted in P.Horn, Rural Life, p.45

<sup>92</sup> Daily Mail, 4 Oct. 1916

<sup>93</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 11 Aug. 1916

<sup>94</sup> Evening News, 6 Oct. 1916



of honour honouring employees or members who had joined up, and representing patriotic self-sacrifice as an heroic duty, women fully occupied keeping homes might rarely see such things. Street shrines with their associated activities were an opportunity to present to them the idea that citizens in arms were bearers of special moral worth, and that their sufferings were achievements of public significance. The Hackney Recorder had used the presence of women in the attack on J.A.Kensit to give legitimacy to the feelings behind it, emphasising the anger of the anxious or bereaved women. Beyond maintaining the shrines out of sentiment for their men, the women were, apparently, determined to defend them as objects of fervent devotion, and this was seen by the paper as a just and responsible attitude.

A number of supporters of the shrine movement explicitly intended them to promote patriotic enthusiasm and support for the war effort. The Lord Mayor of London wrote to the Evening News that war shrines would, amongst other things 'keep alive the fires of patriotism',<sup>95</sup>. Alderman Saint of Islington thought that a shrine proposed for Islington Green in 1918 would not only be a place for laying offerings to the dead, but 'would also serve as a stimulus to the people not to be a party to an inconclusive peace which might mean a repetition of this terrible slaughter in the course of the next generation',<sup>96</sup>. The shrines themselves sometimes contained patriotic images of military leaders, royalty and other war heroes. A Saint Pancras street shrine displayed a union jack with the slogan 'Work for it, Fight for it', and the accompanying picture of Christ supporting a wounded soldier carried the words 'Hit hard, lean hard',<sup>97</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> Evening News, 6 Oct. 1916

<sup>96</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 29 Aug. 1918

<sup>97</sup> Evening News, 4 Oct. 1916

The religious message of the shrine movement was, for the most part, the belligerent, crusading message of churchmen like Bishop Winnington-Ingram of London, who cultivated the view that all who died in the sacred cause of the allies would be assured of their own redemption, which contrasts strongly with the orthodox Anglican insistence on the necessity for faith and repentance<sup>98</sup>. In 1915, Winnington-Ingram had written:

Christ died on Good Friday for Freedom, Honour and Chivalry, and our boys are dying for the same things. ...You ask me in a sentence as to what the Church is to do. I answer MOBILISE THE NATION FOR A HOLY WAR<sup>99</sup>.

If the shrines carried the message of a national crusade fought by local heroes, it is not surprising that those who objected to them were seen not simply as anti-catholic but as enemies of the community and the nation.

A new development of the commemorative movement began shortly before the end of the war, going beyond the existing street shrines and local rolls of honour at town halls. Its aim was to create, under civic sponsorship, sacred commemorative centres for entire towns and cities, at which public ceremonies and private acts of devotion alike could take place. It stemmed from a large rally held in Hyde Park on 4 August 1918 to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the outbreak of war. A shrine was built on the site to act as a centre for floral tributes to the dead<sup>100</sup> (ill.4). It consisted of 'a large white Maltese cross' forming the base, 'with a spire 24 feet high...surmounted by a Union Jack, and

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<sup>98</sup> A.Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.180

<sup>99</sup> The Guardian, 10 June 1915, quoted in A.Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.253, emphasis in the original.

<sup>100</sup> Evening News, 3 Aug. 1918



around it the flags of the allies',<sup>101</sup>. The spire was a tapering octagonal timber structure draped in purple and white cloth<sup>102</sup>. Purple is the liturgical colour worn by priests for the burial of the dead, especially by high Anglicans or Catholics when communion or mass is to be celebrated with the funeral. It is normally worn as a purple stole over a white surplice. These colours had also been used to drape the streets of London for Queen Victoria's funeral, in preference to black<sup>103</sup>. Twenty thousand people were reported to have been present at the shrine on 4 August, and up to a hundred thousand to have visited it within a week<sup>104</sup>. By 15 August the organisers were claiming that two hundred thousand had laid flowers on it, and more people had visited it on the second weekend of its existence than on the first<sup>105</sup>. The Evening News supported a campaign to prevent the structure being removed by the park authorities<sup>106</sup>, and it remained there, often needing refurbishment, until some time in September or October 1919. At that date it was still an object of reverence. A bereaved mother wrote to the Office of Works in October 1919, when she discovered the shrine had finally gone, complaining that 'this outrage on this small sacred spot to the memory of our beloved boys is a dastardly disgrace to England. Is this how we poor brokenhearted Mothers are to be treated?',<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> Evening News, 5 Aug. 1918

<sup>102</sup> Illustrated London News, 10 Aug. 1918; Church Times, 9 Aug. 1918

<sup>103</sup> E.Longford, Victoria R.I., London 1964, p.563

<sup>104</sup> Times, 5 Aug. 1918; Evening News, 12 Aug. 1918

<sup>105</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 15 Aug. 1918

<sup>106</sup> Evening News, 6 Aug. 1918

<sup>107</sup> Public Record Office, WORK 16/26 (8), letter from Mrs A Whitford, 28 Oct. 1919

Construction of the shrine had been arranged by Bishop Winnington-Ingram, with the support of the Lord Mayor of London, and the advertising entrepreneur Charles Higham. It had been paid for by Sir Samuel Waring, of the drapery firm Waring and Gillows<sup>108</sup>. Plans existed for other towns to erect 'a great pyre symbolical of the graves' of the dead in parks or market places for the laying of flowers on the same day, 4 August<sup>109</sup>. There was pressure to keep these shrines as well, and 'Mayors throughout the country to whom appeals were made to retain all shrines until the end of the war' sent 'sympathetic replies', according to the Evening News<sup>110</sup>. Waring offered to pay for a more substantial and durable structure in Hyde Park, and a design was commissioned from Sir Edwin Lutyens<sup>111</sup> (ill.5). Sir Alfred Mond, First Commissioner of Works, who had responsibility for the royal parks, supported the scheme, but there was opposition to the design from the King, the Duke of Connaught, and from senior Office of Works officials, as well as controversy in The Times. The King later consented to a modified design but it was never built<sup>112</sup>.

At the same time, Charles Higham was promoting the idea of permanent shrines for other large cities. The Evening News reported on 14 August that 'the movement to have a permanent shrine in each town bids fair to become national'. The

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid. letter from C.Higham, n.d. (but before 24 July 1918); Evening News, 6 Aug. 1918

<sup>109</sup> Public Record Office, WORK 16/26 (8), untitled press cutting n.d.

<sup>110</sup> Evening News, 10 Aug. 1918

<sup>111</sup> Public Record Office, WORK 16/26 (8), letter from Sir Samuel Waring, 8 Aug.1918

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. letter from Lord Stamfordham, 26 Sept. 1918; letter from Captain Ashworth, 24 Oct. 1918; letter to Lutyens from L.Earle 5 Sept. 1918; (also letters between 3 Oct. and 16 Nov. 1918 in part 2 of this file); Times, 4 Sept. 1918, letter from S.Paget, 6 Sept. 1918, letter from A.Leveson-Gower



mayors of Derby, Lancaster and South Shields were considering schemes. Leicester and Wolverhampton had already expressed approval<sup>113</sup>. On 16 August the Islington Daily Gazette reported that the Hyde Park shrine had 'prompted public desire everywhere for local shrines', and that Higham had written to the mayor of Islington requesting 'that I may have the privilege of presenting [a] shrine to South Islington'<sup>114</sup>.

Higham had a political interest in this particular locality. By October 1918 he had been adopted as the prospective Conservative candidate for Finsbury and Islington South in the next general election. A week after his offer of the shrine was announced, he began a campaign in the local newspaper promoting himself as 'the best-known advertising man in Europe'. He described how he had started his business from nothing, and subsequently worked for Kitchener's recruiting campaign, war savings, the Treasury, and the Red Cross. He did not mention his political ambitions at this stage<sup>115</sup>. His generous offer of the shrine was accepted by Islington council, in spite of doubts expressed by one member as to the disinterestedness of Higham and of the predominantly Conservative committee which had first recommended acceptance<sup>116</sup>. The shrine was unveiled in October 1918 on Islington Green, where it still stands<sup>117</sup>. The only individual referred to by name on it is Charles Higham (ill.6).

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<sup>113</sup> Evening News, 10 Aug. 1918

<sup>114</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 22 Oct. 1918

<sup>115</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 23 and 30 Aug. 1918

<sup>116</sup> Borough of Islington, Minutes of Proceedings, 24 Sept. 1918; Islington Daily Gazette, 24 Aug. 1918

<sup>117</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 28 Oct. 1918

Although it was made of concrete, the Islington shrine followed roughly the pattern of the Hyde Park shrine, having an tapering vertical element on a cruciform base, topped by a flagpole. Interest in shrines on this model did not end entirely with the war. The committee set up at Bradford to organise the local peace celebrations in 1919 seems to have had the Hyde Park precedent in mind when it proposed that a shrine of white painted wood, decorated with purple and white cloth, be erected as a ceremonial focus<sup>118</sup>. The object finally produced was a white, tapering, obelisk-like structure on a tall plinth, surmounted by a cross<sup>119</sup>. The inscriptions on it dedicated it comprehensively to the dead, wounded, bereaved, and to all Bradford men and women who had served in the war<sup>120</sup>. After its unveiling on Peace Day, 19 July 1919, people filed past it to lay flowers, as they had the previous year in Hyde Park.

As commemoration of the war dead developed and spread between 1916 and 1918, it displayed patterns of action common to the civic commemorative tradition of the pre-war era. It owed its growth to the religious, municipal and business leaders of communities, who had been the principal agents of pre-war commemoration, and who were involved in maintaining local support for the war effort in other ways as well, especially in the encouragement of recruitment in the period of voluntary enlistment before 1916. A number of these people thought about the wartime commemorative movement, no matter how ephemeral its expression, as if it were a form of civic commemoration.

In many boroughs, like Hackney and Stoke Newington, the support of mayors added prestige to the street shrine

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<sup>118</sup> Bradford, BBC 1/57/25, City of Bradford, Special Committee re. Peace Celebrations, min. 10 May 1919

<sup>119</sup> Bradford Daily Telegraph, 21 July 1919

<sup>120</sup> Bradford, BBC 1/57/25, min. 7 July 1919



movement. At Orient Street, Southwark, in December 1916, the mayor unveiled a street shrine with the vicar, local dignitaries and choir<sup>121</sup>. The next January, the mayor of Stoke Newington unveiled a street shrine in his borough with a contingent of the local Volunteers and Boy Scouts present, and apparently without any clergy. The shrine had been organised by the local street patrols, groups of often middle-class volunteers, who assisted in the maintenance of local security and public morality. In this case a member of the street patrols committee had made the shrine<sup>122</sup>. Local newspapers too, enthusiastic promoters of civic commemorations in the past, and guardians of civic pride, paid considerable attention to the street shrine movement and set the appropriate tone of reverence in their reports about them, even if they did not follow the example of the Evening News and actually raise money for them. Celebration of the local community's part in the war helped to spread interest in the shrine movement, even in its initial stages. Queen Mary had visited Hackney to see the street shrines, according to the vicar, after 'hearing of the great response to the call for men in this parish'<sup>123</sup>. In other words, her visit was as much a recognition of local recruiting achievement as an expression of sentimental interest in the shrines. It was a fillip at least to communal, if not strictly speaking civic, pride.

Some commentators who accepted that public memorials ought to offer a contribution to improving the quality of communal life, applied this standard to street shrines. The writer G.R.Sims described the war shrines in 1916 as part of a 'great Festival of Remembrance', and praised them for enhancing the street environment and life in it. 'In many a mean street these War Shrines will be as a green oasis in

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<sup>121</sup> Southwark, untitled press cutting 29 Dec. 1916

<sup>122</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 5 Jan. 1917

<sup>123</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 4 Sept. 1916

the desert. They will bring beauty and fragrance into many a grey life and many an unlovely street',<sup>124</sup>. When Selfridges held an exhibition of war shrines, the Church Times reviewed it unfavourably, using terms applicable to fine craftwork, and with an eye to the capacity of the works exhibited to contribute to the improvement of daily life. The reviewer judged that the exhibits did 'not give any great encouragement to those who look for a revival of art in daily life' and suggested that clergy should consult architects for designs of a higher quality<sup>125</sup>.

Jubilee commemorations had made a point of addressing the young, to impress on them the importance of the occasion, through festivals in which school children participated - in dancing, sports and tableaux - and through entertainments and firework displays. Presenting them with commemorative objects, medals, mugs or other souvenirs, was supposed to reinforce the impression on the children and 'serve as a permanent reminder in their mature years',<sup>126</sup>. The Lord Mayor of London thought of war shrines as a similar address to the young. Shrines 'will have an excellent educational effect on the rising generation, who will thus be helped to realise what their fathers and brothers have done in this great fight for righteousness, liberty and honour',<sup>127</sup>.

Participation by the community at large had been an important aspect of civic commemorations, and this, too, was included in the production of war shrines. They were portrayed as an expression of popular feeling through the contributions local people made towards them, whether of money or of materials, labour and maintenance. They were

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<sup>124</sup> Evening News, 6 Oct. 1916

<sup>125</sup> Church Times, 3 Nov. 1916

<sup>126</sup> Kentish Mercury, 4 June 1897, letter from 'Sexagenarian'

<sup>127</sup> Evening News, 6 Oct. 1916



also seen as a source of increased communal solidarity. The Church Family Newspaper stated that 'a deep sense of corporate fellowship has been engendered by the street shrines, uniting the families of those who have been commemorated in a bond of sympathy and comradeship',<sup>128</sup>. Moreover, the interest shown by Queen Mary in the shrines in working class districts offered an opportunity for the expression of class harmony and of the idea that the burden of anxiety and loss was shared equally by families of high and low social status<sup>129</sup>.

It is clear from this survey that the commemoration of the Great War dead was not simply a retrospective activity which began with a release of feeling made possible by the end of hostilities. Commemoration had been incorporated into the wartime effort to keep up home-front morale and to focus attention on servicemen at the front in a personal way. It was a way which did not depend on stories about a selection of exemplary heroes, but on concern for the vulnerability of the ordinary citizen-soldier. Personal acquaintance and attachment were transformed through commemorative acts into a public affirmation of support for those engaged in the fighting. Through the street shrine movement, ordinary members of the public who were concerned about their friends and relatives in the forces were given an active role in expressing anxiety or a sense of loss, and in taking action to assuage them, so far as that was possible. At the larger wartime public ceremonies of remembrance, homage to servicemen was expressed in massive attendances to lay flowers on shrines. These could also to some degree be 'tended' by mourners through frequent visits to renew their floral tributes.

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<sup>128</sup> Church Family Newspaper, 10 Nov. 1916

<sup>129</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 11 Aug. 1916

Fear and danger and the experience of bereavement could not be ignored, either by private individuals or by the public authorities. Commemorative ceremonies and shrines provided vehicles through which ordinary people could participate in making a response to these feelings, and the emotion was channelled into maintaining commitment to the war effort. The celebratory intention of earlier civic commemorations was present, as was the promotion of communal unity regardless of class, but these were adapted to the circumstances of war: widespread emotional stress and the political exigencies of national mobilisation. After the war, this mixture of political and emotional purposes continued to inform the commemoration of the dead, as subsequent chapters will show.



## Chapter 3

## Public Discussion of War Memorials

When a community came to erect a permanent war memorial, it had first to make a choice from a wide range of alternative types. The local memorial committee would invite suggestions from members of the public, and then hold a debate on the proposals in public or committee meetings. However, discussion of memorials was not confined to meetings. Newspapers, books, pamphlets, lectures and exhibitions all provided vehicles for discussing and disseminating ideas about memorials. Much of this activity was conducted by professional bodies, or educational and philanthropic groups concerned with cultural or social reform, and who saw an opportunity in the commemoration of the dead to advance the causes they stood for.

The possible types of memorial divided broadly into two categories: works of public art, and socially useful facilities. Some people believed that the only really worthy object was something devoted entirely to the dead, such as a beautiful and morally elevating work of public art. Philip Gibbs, a well-known war correspondent, argued that 'our war memorials should be for...Remembrance and not for Utility, first of all, or for Philanthropy before all else'<sup>1</sup>, and the sculptor W.Reynolds-Stephens claimed that a utilitarian memorial 'evinces no real desire to keep green the memory of the great heroism of the fallen'<sup>2</sup>.

Others regarded monumental art as worthless because it was expensive and did no practical good. They believed that

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<sup>1</sup> Carlisle, Ca/C10/12/1, undated and untitled press cutting included in Carlisle Citizens' League Minute Book No.2, 12 May 1915 - 23 Aug 1923, and most probably collected in 1919 or 1920 when the type of memorial for the locality was under discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Undated reprint included in Wirral, ZWO/16, with a letter dated 13 Oct. 1918.

whatever resources were available should be devoted to producing some social improvement if the result was to have any lasting value. A press cutting sent to the war memorial committee at Llandrindod Wells said that the 'mania' for monuments 'is one of the most wasteful and foolish that now plague the world. Let our monument...be the memory of our dead - as well as to do the best we can for those who survive them'<sup>3</sup>. At Wigton, Cumberland, a committee member defended the choice of a recreation ground as the urban district's memorial on the grounds that it was intended to commemorate not only the dead, but those who had received military honours and all who had served. He insisted that 'to talk of putting the whole collection into a glorified tombstone was ridiculous. ...in these days it would be absurd and a tremendous folly to spend a large sum on a stone which would be of no use except as a memorial'<sup>4</sup>.

This chapter looks at the attitudes of members of the public, and of various identifiable groups, to memorials. The proposals made for war memorials, and the arguments advanced in favour of them illustrate the issues people thought their memorials should address, and, consequently, the interests they had in helping to erect them. They also show that people's ideas about the purpose of memorials, and consequently about the kind of memorial they would prefer to erect, were permeated by secular political and social values.

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<sup>3</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, File 2, cutting endorsed 'received 2 Apr. 1919'.

<sup>4</sup> Carlisle Journal, 20 June 1919



### 1. The Alternatives

Monuments pure and simple could be conventional forms of fine or decorative art, such as figurative statues, wall tablets, or stained glass windows. Alternatively they might be of an architectural type: crosses, obelisks or cenotaphs on the model of the one in Whitehall. Less frequently, monumental arches were considered. One was built at Leicester (ill.7), another was proposed for the centre of Carlisle<sup>5</sup>. A building could be chosen whose purpose was solely to be a monument or secular shrine, either on a grand scale, like the Hall of Memory at Birmingham and the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle (ill.8), or more modest, like the Bedfordshire Regiment memorial at Bedford (ill.9). A monumental extension or embellishment could be added to an existing building, like the Victory Arch at the main entrance to Waterloo Station, London (ill.10). (This building was actually still under construction during the war).

A number of social service buildings with no pretensions to monumentality were also frequently chosen as war memorials. Small cottage hospitals in urban and rural areas, or new wards or departments for large hospitals, were not uncommon. Entire new general hospitals were built at Watford and Woolwich. For Leeds, 'A Soldier's Father' suggested 'a beautiful garden suburb' for the disabled, and then for veterans as they retired or became infirm<sup>6</sup>. Westfield Memorial Village at Lancaster actually put this idea into practice<sup>7</sup> (ill.11).

Village halls, bus shelters and park benches also made acceptable memorials. Provision for a district nursing

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<sup>5</sup> Carlisle Journal, letter from F.Telford, 15 Nov. 1918

<sup>6</sup> Yorkshire Post, 15 Nov. 1918

<sup>7</sup> See page 115

service, with a cottage, was made in some places. Menston in Yorkshire, Burwell in Cambridgeshire, and the Cumbrian parishes of Patterdale and Ravenstonedale all chose nursing schemes to be their memorials. At Patterdale the plan was to include a shrine in the nurse's cottage, and at Burwell the cottage has a tablet on one end wall carrying local soldiers' names. Inscriptions or dedicatory plaques on buildings of this kind were often extremely plain and unlikely to attract a great deal of attention. The buildings themselves were not expected to create an impact by their appearance. Their value lay in the life-enhancing service they provided. Some more unlikely suggestions were made, such as the proposals at Kirkoswald, Ravenstonedale and Allhallows for the installation of electric light<sup>8</sup>. At Kirkoswald the electricity was to be generated by water power. At Kirkhaugh in Northumberland one proposal was to lay on water to the village school<sup>9</sup>.

Some memorial buildings mixed useful and monumental functions, such as cloisters for public shelter which bore the names of the dead on their walls, or museums and art galleries which incorporated chapel-like shrines to the dead. A small structure, combining shrine and cloister, exists at Broomfield Park, Enfield, as Southgate war memorial, with bronze name panels on the wall (ill.12). Stockport Art Gallery includes a shrine of striking religiosity, with an apsidal end containing a statue lit dramatically from above. The walls are marble panels carved with the names of the dead (ill.13).

Parks, recreation grounds and bowling greens were chosen as war memorials in a number of places. Scholarships were provided for children of the dead, and relief funds for

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<sup>8</sup> Carlisle Journal, 11 Mar. 1919, 1 Apr. 1919, 8 Apr. 1919

<sup>9</sup> Carlisle Journal, 27 June 1919



their dependents, or for disabled survivors of the war and ex-servicemen in other difficulties. Hull's war memorial, proposed in 1918, was a large fund, The Great War Trust, for disabled ex-servicemen and merchant seamen, and for the dependents of the dead. Its purpose was to ensure that 'their future should not be jeopardised by their sacrifices during the Great War in consequence of their services to the British crown and Empire'<sup>10</sup>. At Greystoke, Cumberland, a new river bridge was built<sup>11</sup>.

Out of this variety of possibilities a war memorial committee had to make a choice which would command the general assent of the interested public. Most committees started by calling for suggestions. At Stoke Newington a total of 32 was eventually received, 12 of which were for monuments. These included a memorial entrance to the public library (which was eventually built), a cloister in Clissold Park, 'a column pillar' with the names of the dead and disabled, 'a sculptural or other monument', and a clock tower. Utilitarian suggestions included buying up existing hospital facilities or building new ones, endowing scholarships in art or literature, setting up a fund to buy books for the borough library, 'artistic workmen's dwellings' to be owned by the borough council, a nursery school, a playground, a park shelter and a swimming pool<sup>12</sup>.

Letters to the Town Clerk at Sheffield suggested arches, a granite slab, an entrance for the proposed new City Hall containing an elaborate sculptural programme, and several ideas for stone structures carrying decorative and

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<sup>10</sup> Hull City Record Office, City of Hull Great War Trust, Charter, 28 Mar. 1923, p.2

<sup>11</sup> Carlisle, PR/5/186, min. 19 Mar. 1921

<sup>12</sup> Hackney Archives Department, SN/W/1/11, Stoke Newington War Memorial, list of proposals

allegorical sculpture. Suggestions in the newspapers at Leeds included a massive colonnade at the entrance to a new office development, a small classical rotunda with the figure of a victorious but dying soldier, temples or halls of honour, a new museum or library, the acquisition of Adel Moor for the town, houses for returning servicemen and scholarships for their children, even the donation of the city's memorial fund to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to help pay off the national debt<sup>13</sup>.

Many of the suggestions people made for war memorials were based on familiar precedents. The dead of the Boer War were frequently commemorated by monuments in honour of all ranks. This occurred most frequently in those large industrial towns which sent volunteer units to South Africa, and in the garrison towns of county regiments, though parish or township memorials can be found, as at Hawarden, Flintshire, where the monument is a crucifix, or at Low Fell in Gateshead, where it is a small stone figure of a soldier. Some utilitarian memorials were founded in memory of the Boer War dead. The Union Jack Club in London was opened in 1907 as 'a national memorial to the men who died in the South African War and a continual benefit to soldiers and sailors'<sup>14</sup>. A village hall was built at Attleborough in Norfolk as a Boer War memorial<sup>15</sup>.

Socially useful institutions, commonly hospitals, public libraries or recreation grounds, were built to commemorate royal jubilees, deaths and coronations in the late Victorian

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<sup>13</sup> Yorkshire Post, 8 June 1920, letter from F.H.Mohun. This suggestion was probably prompted by Stanley Baldwin's anonymous but well-publicised donation of £120,000 for the same purpose, as 'a thank offering', a year previously. See K.Middlemas and J.Barnes, Baldwin, London 1969, p.73

<sup>14</sup> Times, 23 Aug. 1915

<sup>15</sup> I owe this information to Dr Judith Rowbotham. The hall has since been rebuilt.



and Edwardian eras. They were provided at the expense of rich donors, by public subscription, or by a mixture of both. Part of the women's jubilee gift to Queen Victoria, paid for by a nationwide subscription in 1887, had been devoted to founding Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses, which made a renewed appeal for funds in 1901 to commemorate the Queen's death<sup>16</sup>. Bootle's memorial to Queen Victoria had been a nursing fund, supporting two nurses, established in 1901<sup>17</sup>. When South Shields chose to erect a statue to the dead Queen in 1901, other contenders had been a 'memorial temple' (in fact an assembly room or concert hall), a convalescent home for patients from the local voluntary hospital, a fund in aid of the hospital itself, a fund to provide trained nurses, and scholarships 'to encourage special branches of education'<sup>18</sup>. The Welsh National Memorial to Edward VII was a national subscription fund for the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis<sup>19</sup>.

## 2.Publicity

By 1918 discussions about war memorials were common in art and architecture periodicals and in the daily press. Many memorial projects were already under way. National and local papers carried a mass of reports of decisions about memorials, commissions for them, and unveilings. The Times regularly mentioned the unveiling of memorials in places of all sizes in its brief news items during and after the war. The Carlisle Journal had regular reports of the meetings of

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<sup>16</sup> Tyne and Wear, T95/93, County Borough of South Shields Queen Victoria Memorial, Box 1, letter to mayoress of South Shields, 4 May 1901

<sup>17</sup> Liverpool Echo, 28 Feb. 1906

<sup>18</sup> Shields Daily Gazette, 22 May 1901

<sup>19</sup> National Library of Wales, Minor lists and summaries 1052, Edward VII Welsh National Memorial Association

memorial committees in towns and villages in the north west, and of the decisions they made. Articles by regular critics and notable figures, like Philip Gibbs<sup>20</sup>, or Sir Alfred Mond<sup>21</sup>, appeared in the press, discussing what kind of objects were appropriate, how to judge good design, the best procedures to adopt to ensure it, and what feelings and ideas should be expressed in memorials. The Local Government Chronicle published a special supplement on 'suggested designs for war memorials' offering sample designs for a memorial cottage hospital, a village memorial hall, an obelisk and a cross. The paper believed that while 'these plans and designs cannot be expected to meet the views of every district, ...they will form a sufficient basis for any committee which is embarking on a scheme of the kind, and in a considerable number of cases they will probably suggest the exact combination and arrangement which is required'<sup>22</sup>.

There is evidence that people took the press discussion seriously, and used its arguments to confirm and develop their views. Hoylake and West Kirby's committee minutes include a reprint from The Times of a letter by W.Reynolds-Stephens supporting monuments as memorials in preference to utilitarian projects. It was sent to the Secretary in a letter promising a £100 donation<sup>23</sup>, presumably to reinforce the argument in favour of a monumental memorial. The same use was made of a newspaper cutting in correspondence at Llandrindod Wells, though putting the opposite case<sup>24</sup>. An article by Philip Gibbs

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<sup>20</sup> See note 1, p.94

<sup>21</sup> Pall Mall Gazette, 26 Aug. 1918, quoted in Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, series 3, v25, Sept 1918, p.247.

<sup>22</sup> Local Government Chronicle, 24 May 1919

<sup>23</sup> See note 2, p.94

<sup>24</sup> See note 3, p.95



arguing that memorials should convey a message, not serve a utilitarian end, is amongst the records of Carlisle Citizens' League, the organisation which was principally responsible for the erection of the Cumberland and Westmorland joint counties' memorial at Carlisle. Presumably it was kept because someone believed the writer's view to be authoritative and useful in an argument<sup>25</sup>.

A number of voluntary and official bodies were set up to promote interest in war memorials by publishing pamphlets and sponsoring exhibitions. Late in 1915 the Civic Arts Association was formed to promote good design in all aspects of the physical reconstruction of the country which was expected to follow the war, but first and foremost in the production of war memorials. The Lord Mayor of London was president. The painter George Clausen, the architects W.R.Lethaby and A.E.Richardson, Henry Wilson, president of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, and Harold Speed, Master of the Art Workers' Guild, were amongst the members of its council. The Honourable Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth was secretary. Lord Henry Cavendish Bentinck, Viscount Cobham and 'a large number of other influential people' announced their support<sup>26</sup>. A press release issued to announce its inaugural meeting warned that, 'unless steps are taken to provide direction and advice' war memorials 'will be of the usual trivial and commonplace type'. The Association was 'prepared to offer the guidance of an expert advisory committee to public bodies or private persons desiring such assistance, in all questions of design'<sup>27</sup>. It also aimed to 'encourage, for civic purposes, the Arts and Crafts throughout the country...by means of the publication of

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<sup>25</sup> See note 1, p.94

<sup>26</sup> Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, series 3, v.22, Oct. 1915, p.527

<sup>27</sup> Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, series 3, v.25, 5 Feb. 1916, p.125.

pamphlets and the holding of exhibitions and lectures...<sup>28</sup>.

In March 1918 the Royal Academy of Art announced that it was forming an advisory committee on war memorials 'in response to requests for advice from various quarters'<sup>29</sup>, and issued a leaflet called 'Suggestions for the Treatment of War Memorials'. They presumably circulated this unsolicited to public bodies which they thought likely to commission memorials, as one was received by Wakefield Council in April<sup>30</sup>. The Royal Society of British Sculptors also circulated advice to local authorities, some of which was received at Llandrindod Wells in February 1920<sup>31</sup>.

The Church issued advice from Deans and Chapters and from Bishops' conferences at Lambeth Palace. Several dioceses set up advisory committees to which their parishes could refer. Diocesan Chancellors had final authority over what was put up in or near churches, and this gave them a large measure of control on both artistic and doctrinal grounds. Clergy were required to obtain a 'faculty' from them to authorise any change in or addition to church buildings, though this rule was not always obeyed. Church authorities took this action as a conservation measure, hoping to discourage the erection of a mass of new memorials to individuals in its historic buildings. In 1912, a parliamentary select committee had threatened government intervention if more was not done to preserve ancient church buildings, and the Archbishop of Canterbury had promised

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<sup>28</sup> Civic Arts Association, Annual Report 1920, p.3.

<sup>29</sup> Royal Academy, Annual Report 1918, p.65

<sup>30</sup> Wakefield Borough Council, General Purposes Committee, min. 22 April 1918

<sup>31</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, circular received 25 Feb. 1920



that the Church would take steps to improve its conservation policy<sup>32</sup>.

Local bodies also offered advice. The Leeds Civic Society was established in 1918, intending to stimulate 'a wider concern for the comeliness of the City', and 'to link beauty with usefulness in things private and public, whether building, traffic, work or play'<sup>33</sup>. It held an exhibition of war memorial designs in 1920, at which the architect Sir Reginald Blomfield gave the opening address<sup>34</sup>. A lecture on war memorials was given to the Birmingham Architectural Association in 1922<sup>35</sup>.

A number of professional and other groups tried to exploit the interest shown by the general public in war memorials to advance their special interests. The arts, religion, education, and philanthropy were all promoted through contributions to the public discussion of memorials, frequently showing an unrealistically high expectation of the changes which could be achieved in the public's aesthetic or religious outlook through the erection of memorials.

Architects with a special interest in town planning and urban improvement made commemoration of the war dead into a platform to promote their professional concerns. Stanley Adshead, professor of planning at University College, London, gave a number of lectures on war memorials in 1916 and 1917, proposing that memorials should consist of

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<sup>32</sup> 'The Origin and Growth of the System of Advisory Committees for the Protection of Churches', in The Protection of Our English Churches, Report to the Central Committee for the Protection of Churches, 1923, p.8

<sup>33</sup> West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, Leeds A.D.Misc (GA/C/48), Leeds Civic Society, Constitution 1919, p.2

<sup>34</sup> Yorkshire Post, 17 Apr. 1920

<sup>35</sup> Builder, v.122, 24 Feb. 1922, p.260

comprehensive urban improvement schemes. The funds collected for a memorial would, in effect, be used as capital for a high quality building project in which some monumental item, statue, arch, obelisk, etc., referring to the dead would have pride of place. In an address to the Town Planning Institute, he argued that memorials should be focal points for the reconstruction of the decayed areas of towns. It would then be possible to ensure that the siting of a memorial was properly controlled and adequately dignified surroundings provided for it. The memorial scheme would thus form the basis for 'a real civic awakening',<sup>36</sup>.

Adshead was a neo-classicist town planner, one of a group originating at Liverpool University under the leadership of C.H.Reilly. In 1918 he wrote a pamphlet published by the Civic Arts Association entitled The Centres of Cities. It was not explicitly concerned with war memorials, but his ideas about the place of monuments in urban redevelopment were clearly expressed in it. He wanted to promote a taste for 'civic grandeur' and for coherent composition of the town as a whole. He took the new development of Kingsway, in London, as an example. It was, he said, a fine idea marred by the 'excessive individual expression...of prospective leaseholders' which had prevented overall co-ordination of the building designs. Streets should be widened, if only for practical and hygienic reasons, and punctuated by 'triumphal arches and features of secondary importance like columns, statuary, fountains, clocks, monuments',<sup>37</sup>.

Lionel Budden, also associated with Liverpool University, took Adshead's principles further. He proposed the preparation of regional plans to combine the erection of

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<sup>36</sup> Builder, v.112, 16 Feb. 1917, p.121

<sup>37</sup> S.D.Adshead, The Centres of Cities, Burnley 1918, pp.7, 6, 18.



memorials with all other aspects of post-war social and economic reconstruction, subject to a national 'Supreme Commission'. Each civic reconstruction programme should start, he said, with an element 'whose treatment shall most effectively constitute a war memorial....some tangible earnest of all that is to come'. He urged 'the rapid achievement, in every large city, of a cardinal reform on a monumental scale' such as 'the creation of a civic centre',<sup>38</sup>.

Britain's town planning legislation provided by the Town Planning Acts of 1909 and 1919 did not offer an opportunity to implement the kind of comprehensive urban design these architects were committed to. They hoped that, in the absence of a statutory requirement for such co-ordinated design, opportunities could be created by arousing influential public support. Adshead and the planning pioneer Patrick Abercrombie both stated publicly that comprehensive planning could only be implemented if it won public backing<sup>39</sup>. Abercrombie in particular attempted to evangelise the cause of town planning through local civic societies in the 1920s and 30s. War memorial projects provided a popular forum through which public interest in large-scale redevelopment plans might have been aroused.

Interest in ambitious planning schemes was not confined to the professionals who hoped to undertake them. George Swinton, a former leader of the London County Council, and an enthusiast for monumental civic improvement, contributed an article to the magazine Nineteenth Century in November 1916, advocating such a scheme for London, and discussing

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<sup>38</sup> 'The Regional and Civic Commemoration of the War', Town Planning Review, v.7, n.3, Mar 1918, pp.190-1.

<sup>39</sup> Adshead, Centres of Cities, p.18; P.Abercrombie, 'The Place in General Education of Civic Survey and Town Planning', Town Planning Review, v.9, n.2, July 1921, p.109

the development finance which would be required<sup>40</sup>. Swinton was not a professional designer, but he had considerable experience of municipal politics, administration and finance. He later became one of the main promoters of the Scottish National War Memorial. In his article he put forward a proposal for a national memorial on the site of Charing Cross station, a project which was supported by a number of architects and politicians. (Adshead also published a plan for the site and an adjoining bridge<sup>41</sup>.) Swinton outlined a scheme for making the monumental development a sound commercial proposition by taking advantage of the improvement in land values which would be involved. He ended with a vision of a great domed memorial building surrounded by terraces and new river bridges, which would create an imperial monumental centre.

Late in 1918 a committee of industrialists and politicians was formed to promote an ambitious scheme for the redevelopment of central Westminster, and to raise funds through a body called the Empire War Memorial League. Lord Leverhulme, Lord Duveen, Arthur Stanley MP, and the steel manufacturer Sir Robert Hadfield were amongst its members<sup>42</sup>. The plan, designed by Charles Pawley included a new university, theatres, art galleries, a "Hall of Nations", monumental buildings for science and the arts, and a new bridge over the Thames<sup>43</sup>. Other civic redevelopment schemes which included a profit-making element, combining ideas like Adshead's on design with those like Swinton's on development finance, were proposed for Leeds<sup>44</sup>, Carlisle<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> G. Swinton, 'Castles in the Air at Charing Cross', Nineteenth Century and After, v.80, Nov. 1916, pp.966-980

<sup>41</sup> London Society Journal, n.12, Feb. 1917, pp.5-6

<sup>42</sup> Builder, v.116, 7 Feb. 1919, p.151

<sup>43</sup> Builder, v.115, 8 Nov. 1918, p.278

<sup>44</sup> Yorkshire Post, 5 June 1919



and Islington<sup>46</sup>. None of these projects received adequate public support. They would have been very expensive, and the Westminster plan very soon came into conflict with the chapter of Westminster Abbey<sup>47</sup>. Even so, the Empire War Memorial League was still active in some capacity in 1923<sup>48</sup>.

W.R.Lethaby also hoped to influence the production of memorials in accordance with his professional commitment as an architect, although his attitude was quite unlike that of the Liverpool University classicists. He was especially concerned about the relationship between the arts and everyday life, and followed the doctrines of William Morris on the subject. 'Properly,' he told the Arts and Crafts Society in 1916, 'art is all worthy productive work'<sup>49</sup>. 'What I mean by art', he said, 'is order, tidiness, the right way of making things and the right way of doing things, especially the public things of our towns and cities'<sup>50</sup>. In 1919, he wrote an article advocating utilitarian memorials, not because he thought practical facilities were preferable to works of art, but because the latter were not truly art unless they made a practical contribution to life. 'Most of the great works of men have been memorials,' he argued, 'and all the greatest memorials have been aids to life. ...Waterloo Bridge is the very

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<sup>45</sup> Carlisle Journal, 25 Apr. 1919

<sup>46</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 26 Aug. 1918

<sup>47</sup> Builder, v.116, 7 Feb. 1919, p.151

<sup>48</sup> Builder, v.124, 18 May 1923, p.801

<sup>49</sup> W.R.Lethaby, 'Town Tidying', in Lethaby, Form in Civilization, London 1922, p.17

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p.18

finest memorial we have'<sup>51</sup>. 'The best of all memorials', he said, 'would be those which helped speedily to organise the drifting masses of men who are returning to *promises*, and unproductive monuments will not do that'<sup>52</sup>. He proposed rebuilding towns and villages, replacing workhouses with hospitals for the aged, founding universities, as well as schemes which had nothing to do with building, ranging from festivals to planting hedgerows with fruit trees. Most important of all, he maintained, was providing houses for returned soldiers and for the widows of those who would never return<sup>53</sup>.

A movement to promote the restoration or new erection of wayside crosses as war memorials began in 1916. The idea of promoting wayside crosses, on the traditional medieval pattern, as war memorials was proposed in letters to the press in mid-1916<sup>54</sup>, at the same time as the Church of England's war shrines campaign was getting under way. The Earl of Shaftsbury sought permission from the Bishop of Salisbury to restore ancient crosses in Dorset as war memorials<sup>55</sup>. A Society for Raising Wayside Crosses was formed, with Shaftsbury as president, in the hope that the desire emerging 'in almost every village' for memorials to the war dead would offer an opportunity for the spread of crosses<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> W.R.Lethaby, 'Memorials of the Fallen: Service or Sacrifice?', Hibberts Journal, July 1919, reprinted in Lethaby, Form in Civilization, London 1922, pp.59 and 60

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p.57

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. pp.60 and 65

<sup>54</sup> Church Times, 20 Apr. 1916; Challenge, 14 July 1916

<sup>55</sup> Builder, 18 Aug. 1916, p.95

<sup>56</sup> The Wayside Cross Society, Wayside Crosses, London 1917, p.5



In 1917, the society published a pamphlet describing its aims and giving advice about the commissioning and design of wayside crosses. It thought a feeling existed that 'the present time is singularly opportune' for the restoration in Britain of 'Wayside Crosses and Calvaries which in foreign lands are such an appealing reminder to the wayfarer of the great fact of our Redemption',<sup>57</sup>. It appeared that such crosses had made a great impression on British soldiers in France, and the society assumed that they would have the same effect in Britain. Its interest was in crosses to be erected outside the precincts of churches, to 'appeal to a wider public than can be reached by memorials in churches or churchyards',<sup>58</sup>. The purpose of the crosses would be to 'remind all those who pass along the highways and through the villages of the Great Sacrifice [meaning, in this instance, Christ's sacrifice], and of those who in their degree have followed in its steps,' and 'to claim the country-side, if only in an outward and visible way, for the Christian faith',<sup>59</sup>.

The society combined an interest in archaeology and religious monuments with a Catholic interpretation of Anglicanism, and in this it was an heir to the Ecclesiological Society of the mid-nineteenth century, which had been responsible for the re-introduction into Anglicanism of liturgical practices and architectural forms previously rejected as Roman. While the use of the cross on its own was widely accepted by the early twentieth century, the crucifix, to which the society gave considerable attention, could still cause controversy in strongly Protestant congregations. Many Great War memorials were crucifixes, but some cases were fought in church courts on the issue of whether or not such memorials encouraged

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Wayside Crosses, p.6

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

superstitious (meaning Roman Catholic) practices<sup>60</sup>. The society claimed to be 'working in cordial agreement with the Civic Arts Association', suggesting that its interest lay primarily in promoting the applied arts, but there can be little doubt that its programme was essentially religious. Several clergymen in the council of the society had contributed to the Church's missionary movement in east London parishes. One of its vice-presidents was the Bishop of Stepney, who had taken a prominent part in the war shrines movement there. Another was Lord Hugh Cecil, who was an outspoken high-churchman<sup>61</sup>.

By 1919, the society judged its own activities a failure. It announced its winding up in December that year, having found the public's response disappointing<sup>62</sup>. This must mean that it had been unsuccessful in its religious aims, for, if its sights were set, as it claimed, principally on the 'outward and visible', the problem it really faced was that its efforts were unnecessary. The cross was widely adopted without the society's encouragement.

Support for voluntary medical care in memory of the dead was promoted widely at local level. A considerable number of voluntary hospitals advanced their claims to attention in local discussions about war memorials. When Bradford Corporation invited local people and institutions to send in their suggestions for a city memorial, the Bradford division of the BMA, the Bradford Council of Public Welfare, the Royal Infirmary, Royal Eye and Ear Hospital, the Children's Hospital and the Children's Convalescent fund all wanted a

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<sup>60</sup> Two examples relating to war memorials are given in Builder, v.120, 15 Feb. 1921, p.485, and Birmingham Mail, 10 Jan. 1922

<sup>61</sup> Wayside Crosses, p.7

<sup>62</sup> Church Times, 12 Dec. 1919



new general hospital<sup>63</sup>. The working men members of the committee of Workington Infirmary urged a public meeting about the town war memorial to include a 30 bed extension to the Infirmary in their plans<sup>64</sup>. The treasurer of the Cumberland Infirmary at Carlisle proposed an outpatients department for his institution in a letter to the press<sup>65</sup>. The Miller Hospital in Greenwich produced a rebuilding scheme which it hoped would be adopted as the local war memorial to overcome its serious shortage of accommodation for in-patients<sup>66</sup>. At Islington, on the day before a public meeting was to be held to discuss a memorial for the borough, the Royal Northern Hospital advertised in the local newspaper, presenting its case that an extension of the hospital buildings 'would form a fitting war memorial'<sup>67</sup>.

Another form of social facility frequently produced as a war memorial was the village hall. It also had advocates in the press and in a national institution, the Village Clubs Association. At the 1919 annual meeting of the Association, a speaker urged 'that no better war memorial can be found than a village hall'<sup>68</sup>. W.R.Lethaby, who was contributing a regular column to the magazine The Builder at the time, suggested that 'a hall or something socially useful [is] probably the best form a memorial could take, for the living are starved for lack of the means of civilisation'<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Bradford, BBC 1/56/4/6, min. 22 Sept. 1919

<sup>64</sup> Carlisle Journal, 21 Feb. 1919

<sup>65</sup> Carlisle Journal, 30 May 1919, 29 Aug. 1919

<sup>66</sup> Kentish Mercury, 20 Feb. 1920

<sup>67</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 1 Apr. 1919. At that time the hospital was called the Great Northern Central Hospital.

<sup>68</sup> Times, 5 Apr. 1919

<sup>69</sup> Builder, v.116, 7 Feb. 1919, p.128

In June 1919 a Roads of Remembrance Association was formed, dedicated to 'the adornment of suitable highways and the precincts of schools and institutions with trees in memory of those who gave their lives in the war', recommending especially 'that these trees should be given and planted by relatives, friends, brigade lads, Boy Scouts and school children on or about Peace Day' (19 July 1919)<sup>70</sup>. In October 1919 the ideas put forward by the Association were discussed by the Women's Institute at the coastal village of Solva, Pembrokeshire. It was decided to plant the main road to Saint Davids, where it ran between the lower and upper parts of the village, with horse chestnuts and flowering shrubs, and to erect a cross as part of the scheme<sup>71</sup>. The maintenance of the plantation would be provided for by annual subscriptions to be paid every Armistice Day<sup>72</sup>. By 1929 the association had become the Roads of Remembrance Committee of the Roads Beautifying Association, concerned particularly with beautifying new arterial roads, and was working on the Kingston by-pass. An article in the journal of the London Society in 1930 noted that, although no longer exclusively concerned with the war dead, most of the trees planted in the Roads of Remembrance scheme commemorated people killed during the war<sup>73</sup>.

The Local War Museums Association, founded some time before the end of the war, also attempted to arouse public interest in connection with memorials. It had a very well-connected committee, including a number of peers, amongst whom were Lord Plymouth (a former First Commissioner of Works) and Lord French (the former British commander in France), the chairman of the council of the Library Association, and the

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<sup>70</sup> Times, 7 June 1919

<sup>71</sup> Pembroke County Guardian, 7 Nov. 1919

<sup>72</sup> National Library of Wales, Ms.102958, Solva Roads of Remembrance Accounts, Oct. 1919 - Dec. 1956, undated leaflet

<sup>73</sup> London Society Journal, n.148, June 1930, p.86



president of the Museums Association. C.R.Grundy, editor of the art magazine Connoisseur, wrote a pamphlet for the association, proposing that there should be a war museum in every 'centre of population'. The purpose was to 'keep the memory of the great war fresh in public memory and seize the imagination of posterity, so that instead of leaving merely bald records of names and events...we must provide for them material that will enable them to visualise the experiences through which we have passed, and partake of our hopes, fears, disappointments and triumphs'. While 'the main display should form a permanent memorial to the sailors and soldiers who have offered their lives for their country's service', the museums should also represent the 'endurance, patriotism and charity' of people on the home front. As a result, the servicemen who returned would feel 'appreciated by their fellow citizens', and the bereaved 'will have their sorrow assuaged by pride in the record of their deeds',<sup>74</sup>.

The idea that there should be a national war museum for Britain as a whole was discussed by the Cabinet in 1917, and a committee chaired by Lord Crawford assumed that this project was likely to develop into a national memorial building<sup>75</sup>. The Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle owed its origin to a large extent to the Duke of Atholl's interest in establishing a museum. He wrote to The Scotsman on the subject in 1917, and was in touch with senior Scottish military officers shortly

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<sup>74</sup> Imperial War Museum, 480/11, press cuttings collection, undated pamphlet Local War Museums: A Suggestion

<sup>75</sup> Public Record Office, CAB 23.3, p.226, min. 21 Aug. 1917 contains a discussion of the proposed museum; CAB 24.22: GT 1650 is a discussion paper on the museum as a national memorial by Sir Martin Conway who had been given charge of the national collection of war relics, supported by an analysis of the proposal and suggestions for an appropriate building from the Office of Works; CAB 24.5, G202, 14 Mar. 1918, is the report of Lord Crawford's committee on the subject.

afterwards<sup>76</sup>. To Lord Rosebery, Atholl maintained that his real interest was in a Scottish historical museum, and a war museum was only 'a convenient peg on which to hang the other one'<sup>77</sup>. In 1917 a civic war museum was proposed for Brighton, to include a roll of honour<sup>78</sup>, and A.E. Maylord, who seems to have been an active advocate of war museums, having written to The Spectator on the subject, pressed the idea on the Lord Provost of Glasgow as a war memorial<sup>79</sup>. The idea did not become generally popular.

The architect and town planner Thomas Mawson started a movement, for both personal and professional reasons, to create a garden city to accommodate disabled servicemen<sup>80</sup>. His idea was based on a suggestion made to him by his son, who was later killed in action, as a service owed to the wounded. It envisaged raising a large part of the necessary finance through subscriptions in memory of individuals who had been killed, a form of fund-raising also advocated by the theatre impresario Oswald Stoll for housing disabled veterans<sup>81</sup>. Mawson's proposed garden city would initially provide housing and work facilities for the disabled, but he intended it to expand around this core to include the able-bodied members of their families, and to attract other

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<sup>76</sup> Scottish National War Memorial, Swinton Papers, Bundle 1, manuscript notes. George Swinton emphasises in this sketchy account of the origin of the SNWM that the idea of a chapel was, at this stage, not of great importance to Atholl.

<sup>77</sup> National Library of Scotland, Acc 4714/28, Atholl letters, 16 Aug. 1917

<sup>78</sup> Builder, v.113, 12 Oct. 1917, p.215

<sup>79</sup> Strathclyde, G1/3/1, Lord Provost's file on establishment of war memorials in Glasgow, letter, 30 Nov. 1918

<sup>80</sup> T.H. Mawson, An Imperial Obligation, London 1917

<sup>81</sup> An appeal of this nature, supported by Stoll, was launched for disabled veterans' flats in Hackney in 1916 (Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 16 Oct. 1916).



residents as it grew. He came a little way towards realising this dream in his design for Westfield Memorial Village at Lancaster (ill.11), built between 1919 and 1924, but it contained fewer facilities than he had originally hoped. A garden village was also proposed to Glasgow war memorial committee by the Scottish Veterans Garden City Association<sup>82</sup>.

### 3. Preferences for Memorial Types

The primary purpose of erecting a war memorial was to honour the dead, but the purpose itself did not prescribe the kind of structure which should be erected or the function which it should serve. While people talked about a sense of loss, about admiration for and gratitude to the dead, and sympathy with the bereaved, when discussing what form a memorial should take, they talked far more about its practical function. They could all agree that it was necessary to honour and mourn the dead, but they frequently disagreed about the form of memorial which would best express these feelings. They introduced into their discussions social, ethical and political ideas which had nothing intrinsically to do either with grief or honour, but which did enable them to develop a preference for one type of memorial or another, and to defend it in a debate.

While people often advanced political arguments for their preferences, there was no simple correlation between someone's political outlook and the type of memorial which he or she advocated. There was no automatic reason for people with left-inclined political views to favour, for example, utilitarian memorials, or for those inclining to the right to prefer monuments. We can find Conservative politicians supporting the idea of a hospital extension as

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<sup>82</sup> Strathclyde, G4.1, Glasgow War Memorial, min. 18 Sept. 1919

the local memorial as strongly as their opponents on the left, and Labour politicians advocating monuments. There was probably a tendency for the left to be less enthusiastic about monuments than the right, but people's preferences were often powerfully influenced by purely local circumstances, and local political and religious differences, with the result that their views about a memorial cut across party lines. Besides, many of the concerns which affected their preferences, such as the moral or physical welfare of the community, or the prevention of future wars, were shared equally on all sides of the political spectrum.

Some believed that memorials should communicate political messages, and thus were inclined to prefer a monumental memorial. Philip Gibbs was a Liberal whose experience as a war correspondent had deeply affected his attitude to international peace and disarmament. A good deal of his post-war writing was devoted to describing the horrific and degrading aspects of combat in order to warn his readers against allowing war to break out again. He believed that the Treaty of Versailles had 'violated the hopes of all moderate minded people' in its vengeful imposition of terms on Germany, and had blighted future hopes for peace<sup>83</sup>. The world required 'reason...tolerance...ideals of peace against ideals of force...conciliation' if its post-war ills were to be diminished<sup>84</sup>. When writing about war memorials Gibbs took issue with '"Progressive" members of memorial committees [who], not believing much in sentiment, looking at good money as a means of improving the conditions of the working classes, propose to devote the memorial funds to housing schemes, or to charitable institutions'<sup>85</sup>. (As we

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<sup>83</sup> P.Gibbs, Ten Years After: A Reminder, London 1924, pp.66 and 75

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. p.188

<sup>85</sup> See note 1, p.94



shall see, he was wrong to attribute this attitude exclusively to 'Progressives'.) Such facilities would become obsolete, and devoting money to them was unfair to the memory of the dead and to the bereaved who wished to preserve it, he said.

Gibbs wanted memorials to convey an emotive political and moral message, unobscured by any other consideration. War memorials, he wrote,

should be not only reminders of the great death that killed the flower of our race but warnings of what war means in slaughter and ruin, in broken hearts and agony... The Memorial of the dead must be the safeguard of the living by teaching those who follow to learn wisdom by our stupidity, and to cherish the gift of peace with more than idle thanksgiving. ...Unless our war memorials speak those things they will condemn us of very dreadful callousness, of most shameful selfishness... [I]f there is any art in us now it has its chance<sup>86</sup>,

'Progressives' too might prefer monuments as memorials. George Riddle, Labour councillor and secretary of Carlisle Co-operative Society, thought it best for the town to have a memorial whose significance 'would be easily understood by coming generations... [T]here should go before the people the idea of the sacrifice made by their fellow citizens on their behalf', something which would 'always awaken the deepest instincts and best feelings which belonged to the British people'<sup>87</sup>. The Conservative councillor George King of Stoke Newington suggested that the local memorial 'should take a Sculptural and Horticultural form' and should represent 'the great cause for which our gallant men laid

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Carlisle Journal, 28 Mar. 1919

down their lives - the cause of justice and freedom',<sup>88</sup>. All three men, from their different points of view, saw monuments as active means of expressing political ideas and preserving the values to which they were committed.

Many people judged proposals for war memorials by whether or not they would make a useful contribution to the community's everyday life. In effect, criteria of this sort subjected the choice of war memorial to considerations of welfare policy or to local administrative needs. Proposals for war memorials were frequently presented as supplying a long-felt requirement. A member of Workington war memorial committee obviously thought fulfilling needs of this sort was a satisfactory criterion of judgement, as he said that a park for the town was 'a long felt want' but he could think of others<sup>89</sup>. At Silloth, the memorial committee secretary said that 'a large public hall' was 'very much needed in the town',<sup>90</sup>. A Leeds resident argued: 'Neither the present art gallery nor the free library is consonant with the pretensions of the city, and a worthy public building...would supply a "long felt want"...',<sup>91</sup>.

A new town hall for Islington was supported with the argument that it would contribute to the modernisation and prosperity of the borough<sup>92</sup>, and a statue or clocktower with the argument that if the borough were beautified 'trade will flourish within its borders',<sup>93</sup>. A letter to a Leeds

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<sup>88</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/11, list of suggestions received by the Borough Council by 18 Mar. 1919

<sup>89</sup> Carlisle Journal, 20 Dec. 1918

<sup>90</sup> Carlisle Journal, 1 July 1919

<sup>91</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 11 Nov. 1918

<sup>92</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 25 Sept. 1918, 22 Oct. 1918, letters from A.E.J. Millie

<sup>93</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 11 Sept. 1918, letter from F. Richards



paper from an anonymous but prominent (according to the editor) citizen, said that the Temple of Fame proposed for the city was 'a necessary adjunct to the good government of this city'. It should be a shrine showing 'what our boys have done to reflect glory on our city. The remainder of the building should be devoted to art and literature... In the future the world will demand applied knowledge in both subjects. What could be more practical in a large commercial city than a centre for the education and dissemination of knowledge. Industry needs such a place where it can find tabulated information in a most practical form',<sup>94</sup>.

Halls and medical facilities were the most frequent forms of utilitarian memorial. Both were extensions of existing philanthropic practices. Village halls were seen as an opportunity for the reform of leisure activity and for promoting social harmony in small communities. Non-conformist congregations often favoured village or school halls for wholesome leisure and educational activities, and at Helmsley<sup>95</sup>, in Yorkshire, local Non-conformists, who wanted some form of institute, appear to have held out so strongly against a monumental memorial connected with the parish church that the united town war memorial committee collapsed. But Anglicans too might support the choice of a hall. At Steep, in Hampshire, a village hall and a memorial in the parish church were both unanimously approved by a public meeting which the vicar had called, and both were executed. A number of wealthy and titled residents, including the headmaster of Bedales school, provided funds or offered sites. The hall was to be non-denominational, and was intended, in particular, for use by the working people of the village. A village association was formed by

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<sup>94</sup> Yorkshire Post, 21 Jan. 1919, letter from 'Progress'

<sup>95</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 105, letter from H.E. Newton, and Brierley's notes on compilation of Helmsley war memorial account

the war memorial committee, drawing its members from all classes, to organise the social activities which the hall would accommodate<sup>96</sup>.

British charity hospitals - the large number of hospitals funded by public subscription or endowment - were in serious financial difficulties by the end of the First World War. Many of their problems had been created by the rise in wages and costs which the war had brought, and by competition for lucrative, if only temporary, business catering for military needs. There were conflicting views on what should be done about the crisis. The Dawson Report of 1920 recommended an extensive hospital building programme by the government, and the establishment of local health centres, but later in the same year Ministry of Health expenditure cuts ruled this out<sup>97</sup>. A Royal Commission on Voluntary Hospitals concluded in 1921 that the voluntary system of funding must remain, and the hospitals could only expect limited and occasional government help<sup>98</sup>. War memorial funds offered an alternative to state aid which the charity hospitals grasped. It was particularly welcome to those who opposed an extension of government responsibility in the medical field. The Conservative Alderman Vorley of Islington saw the use of a war memorial fund as a way of preserving the Royal Northern Hospital as a voluntary charity, maintaining that 'few of us would like to see our hospital rate funded or rate controlled'<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup> Hampshire Record Office, 31 M 71/Z1, Steep War Memorial, Mins, 28 Apr. 1919, 7 Nov. 1919, 22 Dec. 1919

<sup>97</sup> B.Able-Smith, The Hospitals 1800-1948: A Study in Social Administration in England and Wales, London 1964, pp.262-282, 291-2, 298

<sup>98</sup> Reports from Commissioners, 1921, v.6, Cmd.1335, Voluntary Hospitals Committee, Final Report, 13 Mar. 1921

<sup>99</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 10 Sept. 1918



On the other hand, people who believed that an increase in state provision for medical care, housing or education was imminent and desirable after the war might form their preferences with this in mind. In 1918, Alderman Wilson of Leeds argued against providing housing for ex-servicemen and scholarships for their children on the grounds that the corporation, as part of the government's housing programme, was 'tackling the housing question', and 'under Mr Fisher's Education Act so much would be done for the children that if Leeds did its duty there would be no need for them to ask for public subscriptions for education'<sup>100</sup>. Another Leeds citizen thought that hospitals would soon become a state responsibility and that rather than contributing to a new children's hospital, as someone had suggested, it would be better to provide a convalescent home<sup>101</sup>.

Popular self-improvement, temperance, the repression of prostitution and illicit sexual relations, all traditional objects of philanthropic interest before the Great War, continued to preoccupy people after it. Those concerned with these matters saw commemoration of the dead as valuable opportunities. Clubs, institutes, even winter gardens offered facilities for salubrious entertainment and recreation, and for voluntary educational activity. Suggestions for buildings of these sorts came from all sides of the political spectrum. The Conservative Alderman Dod of Stoke Newington wanted the local memorial to be an institute for boys, as an alternative to the 'kinema' and music hall, equipped for physical exercise and games such as chess and draughts. This, he said, would be 'a lasting benefit to those on whom we rely for so much. Our hopes for the future are centred on them'<sup>102</sup>. Stoke Newington Labour Party

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<sup>100</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 23 Nov. 1918

<sup>101</sup> Yorkshire Post, 24 Dec. 1918

<sup>102</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/25, untitled press cutting, 28 Feb, 1919

proposed a social and educational centre 'to contain one large Hall or Winter Garden' for lectures, concerts and dancing, serving meals and offering non-vocational classes. It should be managed by a committee which would 'safeguard the Institute from any Political bias',<sup>103</sup>. The Liberal shipbuilder Sir George Hunter had something similar in mind when he proposed a winter garden to Wallsend war memorial committee, and 'referred to the great need in the town for a large public hall and a recreational and educational centre',<sup>104</sup>. He himself would present a site for the building and a substantial donation (perhaps as much as £10,000).

Temperance reform had been an historic concern of many middle and working class Liberals or Non-conformist Christians, and was still an important issue for some after the First World War, in spite of the wartime introduction of modern licensing hours. A speaker supporting the Coalition-Liberal candidate for Carlisle (a Liberal stronghold) at the 1918 general election declared that the drink question was 'a corner stone of all social reform',<sup>105</sup>. Sir George Hunter had promoted temperance reform and wider educational opportunities on Tyneside for many years before the war, and had established The Wallsend Café in 1883 as a centre for technical education, recreation and temperance<sup>106</sup>. It was the site of this building which he offered to the town for its memorial winter garden. He does not appear to have specified that drink should be banned from it, but he must have conceived his gift as a way of furthering the cause of socially responsible recreation in some respect.

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<sup>103</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/11, suggestion 10

<sup>104</sup> Newcastle Evening Chronicle, 26 Jan. 1921

<sup>105</sup> Carlisle Journal, 29 Nov. 1918

<sup>106</sup> W.Richardson, History of the Parish of Wallsend, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1923, p.447



One of the suggestions made at Stoke Newington was for a club 'where the Wives, Sisters, Mothers and Sweethearts' of the dead 'might meet together and enjoy social intercourse'. It should 'be also open to any who might care to join' and so 'act as an institution to promote the mingling of the sexes on a high level, affording opportunity for freedom from those snares that are ever to be found in our streets'. The proposer added that the YMCA and the YWCA should merge 'to purge the streets of London from their greatest evil',<sup>107</sup>. He was presumably concerned with venereal disease (increasingly discussed in the post-war years) and the perennial issue of prostitution.

Ex-service organisations showed a variety of preferences in their contributions to discussions about memorials, which may in some cases be related to their party political allegiances. The identity of local organisations is sometimes not clear, but most were affiliated to one of the three large ex-service organisations formed during the war<sup>108</sup>, or, from 1921, to the British Legion. The National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, formed in 1916, had links to the Labour movement. In 1919 it changed its political complexion to an anti-socialist nationalism. The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers was founded in 1917, under Liberal leadership, in response to the tightening up of conscription regulations, especially where they applied to men who had already served in the forces and completed their term of enlistment. The Federation was an aggressively other-rank body until 1919 when officers were finally admitted<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>107</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/11, suggestion from Mr A.Hutton

<sup>108</sup> A short account of these organisations is given in G.Wootton, The Official History of the British Legion, London 1956, pp.2-12

<sup>109</sup> At both Hull and Stoke Newington there were ex-service organisations referred to as the National Federation of Discharged and Disabled Sailors and Soldiers (Hackney,

Many of the members of the Federation appear to have been supporters of the Labour Party to judge from the considerable number of them who defected to the explicitly socialist National Union of Ex-servicemen when it was formed, also in 1919<sup>110</sup>. The third wartime organisation was the Comrades of the Great War, sponsored by the Conservative Party as a rival to the Federation, with the support of Lord Derby who encouraged Lords Lieutenant and Chairman of Territorial Associations to endorse it. Over a period of some months in 1920-21 the three wartime organisations negotiated a union to form the British Legion. The National Union of Ex-servicemen stood out.

At Stoke Newington the local ex-service organisation, a branch of the Federation, took the position that the state should look after the interests of ex-servicemen and dependents and proposed a building which would be a self-financing public recreation and education centre with an entrance which would contain tablets commemorating the dead<sup>111</sup>. Some branch members appear later to have supported a monumental entrance to the library and others a granite monument, although the reports are confused and conflicting<sup>112</sup>. Support for the granite memorial in this case entailed the wish to see a larger proportion of the fund go to charity. The Enfield Branch proposed a temperance hostel, branch headquarters and memorial hall as a local memorial, and began to collect for it on its own

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SN/W/1/11, and Hull, City of Hull Great War Trust Scrapbook, press cutting, 16 Mar. 1921). I am assuming that these were branches of the National Federation discussed above, but this is not entirely certain.

<sup>110</sup> D.Englander, 'The National Union of Ex-Servicemen and the Labour Movement, 1918-1920', *History*, v.76, n.246, Feb. 1991, pp.24-42

<sup>111</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/11, suggestion 9

<sup>112</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/25, cuttings dated 18 June 1919 and 20 June 1919



initiative<sup>113</sup>. The Federation Branch at Bethnal Green proposed a maternity home attached to the London Hospital<sup>114</sup>, having acquired a club of its own separately<sup>115</sup>. At Sleaford the local branch proposed an ex-servicemen's institute<sup>116</sup>.

Branches of the Association seem to have taken a greater interest in independent monuments. One erected its own cross at Shrewsbury parish church and another campaigned for a monument at Wigton, Cumberland<sup>117</sup>. At Harrogate the Harrogate Ex-servicemen's Association, which may or may not have been a branch of the National Association, erected a crucifix as its own memorial<sup>118</sup>. A representative of ex-servicemen on Maryport memorial committee, who was probably a member of the local Association branch which was granted a delegation to the committee<sup>119</sup> (he was referred to in the newspaper report of the meeting as from the Discharged Soldiers' and Sailors Society) proposed a public hall with a wing reserved for the use of ex-servicemen<sup>120</sup>. The Comrades of the Great War do not appear to have made great efforts to put their preferences about war memorials before the public. At Bradford, the Comrades, the Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers and the Bradford and District Navy and Army Veterans Association all applied to

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<sup>113</sup> Enfield Gazette, 6 Dec. 1918 and 3 Jan. 1919

<sup>114</sup> Tower Hamlets, 082.3 Bethnal Green War Memorial Fund, min. 22 May 1919

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. min. 1 May 1919

<sup>116</sup> Lincolnshire, SLUDC 11/6, mins. 30 June 1919 and 9 Mar. 1920 together make this clear

<sup>117</sup> Carlisle Journal, 30 May 1919

<sup>118</sup> Harrogate Corporation Minutes, min. December 1920, p.9, n.6, petition received for site

<sup>119</sup> Carlisle, S/UD/M/1/2Z/6, min. 29 Jan. 1919

<sup>120</sup> Carlisle Journal, 31 Jan. 1919

be represented on the city war memorial committee and were offered places. Both the Soldiers and Sailors and the Veterans associations put formal proposals to the committee (a garden village for ex-servicemen and a veterans' home) but none is recorded from the Comrades<sup>121</sup>. It is possible that the Comrades tended to work through the leading citizens who often patronised their branches, and were better placed to exert influence on their behalf.

The preferences expressed by community leaders, whether they were officially appointed, like mayors, or were simply private citizens with personal prestige, might be strongly influenced by a sense of the responsibility placed on them by their civic status to ensure that the local commemoration of the dead was properly conducted. A number of such people seem to have been more concerned to ensure that whatever was chosen as a memorial would command wide public support than to pursue a particular preference of their own. Father Crow of Maryport based his opposition to a monumental memorial for the town on the belief that his 'flock' would not approve of one. A hall or a park were his preferences. 'If they gave the workers something that appealed to them', he said, 'the workers would back them up'<sup>122</sup>. We should be careful, then, not to assume that the views expressed by committee members must have been consistent with their ulterior interests or affiliations beyond the confines of the committees on which they served. Their first priority may have been to act properly as leaders in the memorial movement. They might also be motivated by loyalty to local institutions for which they felt a particular responsibility. Lord Northampton was a patron and benefactor of the Royal Northern Hospital in Islington, and a very large local landowner, and argued strongly in favour

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<sup>121</sup> Bradford, BBC 1/56/4/6, min. 22 Sept. 1919

<sup>122</sup> Carlisle Journal, 21 Mar. 1919



of making the borough memorial a contribution to the hospital.

Apparent inconsistencies in the preferences of influential figures may be explained by their sense of what was right in different circumstances. Lord Leverhulme contributed to urban reform movements through membership of concerned bodies such as the Civic Arts Association and the London Society. He endowed the chair of Civic Design at Liverpool University, and commissioned a plan for the redevelopment of Bolton from Thomas Mawson. These interests were reflected in his appearance as chairman of the founding meeting of the Empire War Memorial League, in October 1918, dedicated to raising money for the grandiose civic development scheme designed for Westminster by Charles Pawley<sup>123</sup>. He was also a pioneer of improved housing provision for industrial employees in his own firm's village at Port Sunlight. Yet he praised the decision by Port Sunlight war memorial committee

that the memorial should be an artistic rather than a utilitarian one, such as the building of cottages recently suggested in Parliament. If they had got the money and the men to build cottages, let the building scheme be entirely apart from a memorial intended to commemorate the greatest deeds of heroism the world had ever seen<sup>124</sup>.

At that time (mid-1918) it was known that the government was working on plans for a programme of state aided house building, but investment in prestigious civic centre developments was not considered a state responsibility. Thus Leverhulme may have felt that privately subscribed

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<sup>123</sup> The Builder, v.115, 8 Nov. 1918, p.298

<sup>124</sup> Progress, July 1918, p.79

funds were wrong for the first of these purposes but right for the second.

Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, former Conservative MP for a Glasgow constituency and chairman of the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland, served on the committee which considered the detailed designs for the Scottish National War Memorial, the most flamboyantly monumental of British memorials, and donated £100 of his own money<sup>125</sup>. Earlier, he had expressed a preference for an inexpensive rather than a 'very ambitious' monument for Glasgow. He insisted that the public should be made fully aware that the greater part of Glasgow's war memorial fund would go to helping those who had suffered as a result of the war and only a small proportion on the proposed cenotaph<sup>126</sup>. It may have been a sense that his duty and his loyalties differed in different circumstances, rather than personal inclination, which led him to adopt these otherwise conflicting positions.

It is clear that much of what was publicly said about memorials was less concerned with the memory of the dead than with the needs of the living. Sometimes, it was about preserving them from future wars by warning them about war's dangers, sometimes it was about setting an example of sound political values, sometimes about improving the physical or moral quality of life in practical ways. The question was discussed in this form because past commemorative practice offered such a variety of competing precedents, and because the requirement that the public be involved in the choice of a local memorial allowed people with differing views to make their voices heard. Talking about memorials was an important part of the commemoration of the dead. It made a reality of the ideal of public participation, and it

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<sup>125</sup> Scottish National War Memorial, Bundle 45, subscription list, 5 Mar. 1923

<sup>126</sup> Strathclyde, G4.1, Glasgow War Memorial, min. 18 Sept. 1919



suggested a variety of non-commemorative requirements which might be satisfied by a memorial, either to serve the special interests of those already involved in the project, or to encourage others to join in. However, the choice of a memorial involved a great deal more than simply discussing the matter and making a decision, as the next chapter will show.

## Chapter 4

### The Choice of a Memorial

Choosing the type of war memorial a community should have was an important diplomatic task for local committees. They had to consider the needs, desires and resources of members of the community, and the susceptibilities of groups whose favourable opinion or support was required. A memorial had to be acceptable on two grounds. There must be no serious objection to it from any significant section of local opinion, and, more constructively, it must be of a kind which would arouse the support of the public from whom the funds for it had to be collected. To make sure that a memorial was acceptable, the memorial committee usually consulted the public about what the memorial should be, and obtained ratification of its choice from a public meeting or from a delegate committee of some kind. Public discussion invited the expression of different opinions, and while these might be amicably resolved, they might also lead to factional divisions within the local commemorative movement.

In some places differences of opinion turned into serious public rows. These instances are of considerable interest as they illustrate the tension which might exist within a community about a memorial, the resources available for overcoming it, and the process by which a consensus was formed. Where agreement proved difficult to reach, a decision might be imposed through the practical exercise of financial or organisational power. Some participants exploited the possibilities offered for pursuing partisan ends through the management of committees or of the fund-raising system; others denounced this kind of manipulation and impugned the motives of those who practised it.



### 1. Consensus and Conflict

Although they needed to take account of differing views, memorial committees tried to avoid public controversy. 'Bearing in mind,' said the mayor of Carlisle, 'that we are engaged in devising the best manner of perpetuating the memory of the honoured dead, it would be fitting that as far as practicable the voice of controversy should be hushed'<sup>1</sup>. In many cases an acceptable choice was made without apparent difficulty, but contemporaries certainly believed that there were many disagreements on the subject, and that making a final decision had not been easy for many committees. Philip Gibbs reported that 'large numbers of committees are hopelessly divided and still unable to make any decision upon the various schemes suggested by different members'<sup>2</sup>. 'Civis et miles' wrote to the Carlisle Journal in May 1919 admitting that 'considerable dissatisfaction and discontent' existed below 'the apparent unanimity' of 'parochial meetings'<sup>3</sup>. The Journal itself noted that a 'fundamental difficulty' of war memorial schemes was finding 'a suitable means of expression' which would reconcile all views, and many places were 'finding great difficulty in discovering a satisfactory solution to the problem'<sup>4</sup>. The chairman of Silloth war memorial committee said there had been 'sharp division' over the choice of war memorial wherever the matter had been discussed<sup>5</sup>.

The existence of a variety of rival proposals need not of itself lead to a struggle between members of a war memorial committee over which should be adopted. In some cases it

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<sup>1</sup> Carlisle Journal, 30 June 1919

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 3, note 1, p.94

<sup>3</sup> Carlisle Journal, 13 May 1919

<sup>4</sup> Carlisle Journal, 27 May 1919

<sup>5</sup> Carlisle Journal, 1 July 1919

appears that proposals for memorials were made not because the makers preferred them to any other type of memorial, but rather to stimulate a discussion. The matter could then be settled without conflict in an expression of unanimity. The rector of Lazonby, Cumberland, began the movement to provide a war memorial by circulating a list of suggestions to parishioners which included a drinking fountain, a scholarship, a recreation ground, and a brass tablet in the church<sup>6</sup>. At Burwell in Cambridgeshire discussion of the village war memorial opened with a formal motion proposing a nursing scheme for the village. It seems likely that the motion was planned beforehand between the proposer and seconder, perhaps after talking to other people. A number of alternatives or amendments were put to the meeting - almshouses, a recreation room, and a monument of unspecified form. There was a long discussion, but no proposal apart from the nursing scheme was seconded, and it was unanimously adopted<sup>7</sup>. In other words, none of those who proposed other types of memorial felt strongly enough to stand out. At Scaleby, a cross and a tablet in the church or the parish hall had already been discussed by the parish council before a public meeting was called on the matter<sup>8</sup>. The chairman of the meeting proposed a cross or 'pillar', the vicar a lych gate for the church or a school playground, and another parishioner a brass tablet in the church. After talking about the proposals, the vote was unanimously for the cross suggested by the chairman<sup>9</sup>. It seems that the people who attended were quite willing to accept the feeling of these meetings and join in a unanimous expression of opinion.

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<sup>6</sup> Carlisle Journal, 11 Mar. 1919

<sup>7</sup> Cambridgeshire Record Office, R88/110, Burwell Parish Minutes, min. 12 May 1919

<sup>8</sup> Carlisle, S/PC/38/6, Scaleby Parish Minutes, mins. 17 Mar. 1919 and 1 Apr. 1919

<sup>9</sup> Carlisle, S/PC/38/43, Scaleby War Memorial Minute Book, min. 26 Apr. 1919



For conflict to occur, it was necessary that lobbies should form around proposals, and that each should work for the triumph of its own preference. There had to be a number of people who, for some reason, were prepared neither to leave a committee to get on with the business on their behalf, nor, if they did not like what was being done, simply to take no part. Where the formation of lobbies can be traced, they appear to have been connected with the existence of conflicts which originated outside the business of choosing a memorial.

Political rivalries could lead to disharmony amongst leaders of a local commemorative movement. In London, Stoke Newington borough council was split over its organisation of a war memorial by a dispute which a newspaper traced to internal divisions in the local Conservative party over who should stand as Coalition candidate in the 1918 general election. 'The identity of certain individuals with the scheme seems to have had the effect of fanning into flames the embers of recent political controversy', it said<sup>10</sup>. The then mayor, Herbert Ormond, had stood as a non-party supporter of Lloyd George's coalition against the officially selected (and 'couponed') Conservative candidate while continuing to count on his colleagues' support for the mayoralty. There was considerable criticism of this behaviour from Ormond's fellow Conservatives. As mayor, Ormond was ex-officio originator of the borough war memorial fund, and identified himself firmly with a proposal to build a monumental entrance to the borough library, a project favoured by the borough council's own sub-committee on the subject.

Alderman Francis Dod, like Ormond a Conservative, raised the first serious public challenge to the library entrance scheme. Dod had been a particularly severe critic of

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<sup>10</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 23 May 1919

Ormond's behaviour over the parliamentary candidacy, and was tipped to replace Ormond as mayor in the elections to the post in September 1918 if Ormond's party decided he was no longer acceptable<sup>11</sup>. Dod had also opposed a move to expunge criticisms of Ormond, made in a council meeting after the general election, from the minutes. The majority of Conservative councillors had forgiven Ormond, but Dod was not reconciled. The clash between them had become personal, with Dod accusing Ormond of lying<sup>12</sup>. This was the 'recent political controversy' to which the newspaper referred.

Dod was, according to a newspaper commentator, 'a man of outstanding ability'<sup>13</sup>, but he aroused the hostility of many councillors by his failure to respect certain proprieties of council business procedure. He insisted that the discussion of Ormond's re-election as mayor should not, as usual, be held behind closed doors, but that the press should be admitted in order to prevent journalists receiving garbled accounts privately<sup>14</sup>, and his subsequent attack on the mayor's character caused resentment. He nonetheless had considerable support. He was to be elected mayor twice in future, and he took up popular causes such as defence of the interests of local allotment holders, of whom he was 'uncrowned king'<sup>15</sup>. He was in some respects an incautious populist whose words and actions offended more straight-laced leaders of the borough. Throughout the three years it took to complete plans for Stoke Newington memorial, Dod remained the most uncompromising critic of the scheme, although other councillors also opposed it for various reasons at various times. The struggle was conducted first

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<sup>11</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 20 Sept. 1918

<sup>12</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 24 Jan. 1919

<sup>13</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 20 Sept. 1918

<sup>14</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 18 Oct. 1918

<sup>15</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 7 Feb. 1919



in the council chamber and then in public. It involved the creation of a new war memorial committee, the manipulation of public meetings and of fund-raising initiatives, as well as protests by ex-servicemen and bereaved relatives. How the battle was fought out will be examined in detail below.

Rivalries between religious denominations could also upset the production of war memorials. Many people felt that a war memorial should be on consecrated ground, and so liked the idea of siting it within the precincts of a church. A letter to the town clerk of Sheffield put forward this argument in favour of siting the city memorial at the cathedral<sup>16</sup>. The Bishop of London had proposed to a meeting of Convocation in 1918 that all denominations should be invited to have the names of their dead relatives inscribed on parish rolls of honour 'so that rich and poor who had died together might be enshrined in it for ever'<sup>17</sup>. Non-anglicans, in areas where they had large congregations, might also offer to represent the community as a whole. The war memorial hall with three Sunday school classrooms at East Vale Wesleyan church, Longton, was intended to 'commemorate the men of the district, irrespective of denomination, who have fallen'<sup>18</sup>.

A claim by one denomination to represent all others could prove unacceptable. At Brompton, near Northallerton, and Helmsley, both in Yorkshire, local co-operation broke down over differences of view between Anglicans and Nonconformists about the form and siting of memorials. The war memorial committee at Brompton, near Northallerton, was led by J.P.Yeoman, wealthy resident, prominent local Anglican, Conservative member of North Riding County

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<sup>16</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (16), letter from G.Holmes, 18 July 1923

<sup>17</sup> Chronicle of Convocation, 1918, 9 July, pp.430-31

<sup>18</sup> Staffordshire Sentinel, 19 July 1920

Council, and magistrate. The population of Brompton in 1911 was 1487, and there was linen and cotton manufacturing, but Yeoman regarded it as 'only a small village', and expected to raise only £200<sup>19</sup>. He was determined that the memorial should be associated with the parish church, and his committee chose a lych gate, largely, it seems, on his insistence. (The gate was originally his wife's idea.)<sup>20</sup> Objections were raised to the site by people he referred to as 'a few rabid dissenters'. They had asked him how he would feel if they had proposed to improve the chapel entrance 'by means of a war memorial'. 'The meeting was evidently organised and partly packed against the Church,' he claimed<sup>21</sup>. The committee was deadlocked and the idea of a memorial to represent all denominations was abandoned. There may well have been a political component to this quarrel given the association of religious non-conformity with the Liberal party. Thus the people who objected to Yeoman's proposal for the memorial may also have been his political opponents, adding party to sectarian disagreement, but the issue was essentially a religious one: the siting of the memorial on Anglican ground. It was not a matter of policy differences.

At Helmsley an interdenominational memorial cross was proposed, then abandoned when local Non-conformists<sup>22</sup> swung a general meeting in favour of a hall or institute. This proved too expensive, so a monument was reconsidered. The committee could make no progress and was disbanded. The matter then 'fizzled out', and the Anglican congregation

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<sup>19</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 109, letter from J.P.Yeoman 13 Feb. 1919

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. letters 2 Jan. 1920 and 14 Apr. 1920

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. letter 3 Feb. 1919

<sup>22</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 105, letter from H.E.Newton and Brierley's notes on compilation of Helmsley war memorial account



considered a monument of its own. The original idea had been for a cross which was connected to the street, probably at the parish church to judge from the fact that it was the vicar who had been negotiating with the architect, but the vicar was no longer in favour of such a public site<sup>23</sup>. A letter to the press from the mining village of Monk Bretton, near Barnsley, objected to the local memorial committee's decision to put up a monument at the parish church, unless all other places of worship were given equal treatment, as 90% of the local men who had served in the forces were Non-conformists<sup>24</sup>. This was exactly the solution found to sectarian differences at Kirkoswald, Cumberland. The local Wesleyan superintendent 'took exception' to the community's memorial tablet being placed in the parish church, so the vicar proposed a tablet in both the church and the chapel<sup>25</sup>.

The support of two groups of people - the bereaved and ex-servicemen - could be important to a memorial's success, and their disapproval could make serious difficulties. The bereaved had a claim to special consideration as they had a personal emotional interest in commemorating the dead, and required consolation and recognition of their losses. Ex-servicemen, as the former comrades of the dead, felt they had a special duty to see them properly commemorated. They felt a responsibility to participate in decisions and insisted on their right to do so. Memorial committees normally acknowledged their claims to consideration and were obliged to take particular notice of their views. They not only had prestige in the matter of commemorating the dead, they had many local branch organisations through which they could exercise their influence in local affairs. The bereaved were less powerfully represented, but did have a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. letter from H.E.Newton, 4 Oct. 1919

<sup>24</sup> Barnsley Chronicle, 8 Mar. 1919

<sup>25</sup> Carlisle Journal, 6 May 1919

national organisation with local branches in the British War Graves Association. Ex-servicemen and bereaved were often linked locally through the opportunity offered by ex-servicemen's organisations for widows and dependents of the dead to become associate members. The importance accorded to these two groups by memorial committees, and their ability to exert organised influence, meant that their preferences could seriously affect the production of a memorial, and their support could be decisive in conflicts.

At Sheffield the local branch of the British War Graves Association first put pressure on the corporation to organise a war memorial, once the official proposal for a city memorial hall had been shelved for financial reasons<sup>26</sup>. The branch had set out to show 'that there is really a big public feeling that a cenotaph should be erected'<sup>27</sup>. The local British Legion later joined in its campaign. The city authorities would not grant the Association a site to put up a monument, but eventually commissioned one itself. In some small communities, members of the public might be willing to leave important decisions entirely to the bereaved. At Brancepeth, Durham, the choice of site for the memorial was left to the bereaved<sup>28</sup>, and at Hesket, Cumberland, the bereaved were asked to choose a design for the granite cross, which was the type of monument recommended by the committee<sup>29</sup>. However, the bereaved were not always given the consideration they desired. A number of them in Cockermouth signed a petition that the memorial should be in the cemetery, but a public meeting, by a large

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<sup>26</sup> Sheffield CA 653 (18), letter from C.Styring

<sup>27</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 18 May 1922

<sup>28</sup> Durham, D/Br/E 447 1-4, Brancepeth War Memorial Committee Minute Book, min. 29 Jan. 1920

<sup>29</sup> Carlisle Journal, 3 June 1919



majority, chose Station Road as the site<sup>30</sup>. In Leeds, the War Graves Association made an unsuccessful proposal to site a memorial on the town hall steps, but this was probably intended as a helpful suggestion rather than an urgent request<sup>31</sup>.

In the sectarian conflict about the lych gate at Brompton church, J.P. Yeoman won over the bereaved to the idea by approaching them personally. He thus gained greater legitimacy for his own preference, and made what would otherwise have been a purely Anglican memorial into something which represented, in effect, at least the principal mourners in the community. He wrote to Walter Brierley, 'I now propose to proceed with the original scheme, that is for the Vicar and Churchwardens to erect the lych gate on their own, and I have personally called on all the next of kin and obtained their permission to have the names of the young men inscribed on the walls.' The vicar and churchwardens were to take subscriptions, but would 'make nothing in the nature of a public collection'<sup>32</sup>. Yeoman finally thought he could raise up to £600, which argues no lack of support for his actions<sup>33</sup>.

Sometimes ex-service organisations exercised an important influence in decisions about a memorial. At Appleby the Federation branch insisted on changing the memorial's site from the churchyard to a more public and visible place, arguing that 'We have done our bit for you and our pals who have died are entitled to the best and most public place you can give them'<sup>34</sup>. At Wigton, Cumberland, the type of

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<sup>30</sup> Carlisle Journal, 27 May 1919

<sup>31</sup> Yorkshire Evening News, 4 Mar. 1921

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* letter 2 Jan. 1920

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* letter 14 Apr. 1920

<sup>34</sup> Carlisle Journal, 4 July 1919

memorial chosen - a recreation ground - was condemned by the local branch of the Association as a self-serving manoeuvre on the part of the urban district council to pay for a facility it had promised in the past but been unable to deliver. As a result of the protest a monument was provided as well<sup>35</sup>. After the formation of the British Legion, service veterans continued to act as guardians of propriety in the commemoration of the dead, and might intervene over the design of a memorial. The Swansea branch persuaded the town council to remove bronze tablets which carried the names of people other than the dead from the Court of Memory at the local cenotaph<sup>36</sup>.

Ex-servicemen would fight for their right to participate where they felt it had been denied. Stoke Newington's British Legion members believed they had been unfairly excluded from a crucial public meeting held to make a final decision on the form of the local memorial. Attendance was by ticket only, and only people who had given over ten shillings to the memorial fund were invited. The secretary of the Legion branch wrote to the secretary of the memorial committee asking him to receive a deputation. 'My members are viewing with alarm the method of calling a meeting of subscribers, and are watching very closely this action of your committee,' he said. 'I may conclude that my members will hold you responsible if we are not given a hearing.' In a second letter he wrote that the branch members 'feel that they have a right to attend and give the views of our Members, who include many widows and dependents of the fallen, who have subscribed, but not to the amount of

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<sup>35</sup> Carlisle Journal, 20 June 1919

<sup>36</sup> British Legion Journal, v.3, n.4, Oct. 1923, p.161  
This might be understood to mean the names of living ex-servicemen, but that is most unlikely in a town the size of Swansea. We can be fairly sure that the objection was to the names of civic dignitaries, the designer or contractor.



10/-',<sup>37</sup>. On the day of the meeting 'over 200 ex-servicemen, subscribers and widows were outside the hall protesting', according to a letter to the press<sup>38</sup>.

## 2. Factors Influencing the Choice of a Memorial

Discussion and argument in public meetings, representative committees and newspapers were ostensibly the means by which a memorial was chosen. Much of this concerned the purposes people thought memorials should serve, which we examined in the last chapter. However, the arguments people put forward to support their preference for a particular kind of memorial were not very effective in determining what memorial a community would erect, as they were thoroughly ambiguous and could be applied equally well to competing proposals.

Many argued that the primary purpose of a memorial was to express feeling - grief, admiration, gratitude or sympathy - and claimed that a monument would do this best. At a public meeting about Leeds war memorial, the Lord Mayor spoke in favour of a monument to express grief and loss:

It needed to be in keeping with the inspiration of a lost son. ...This was a nation mourning for its children, a city mourning for its lost ones, and he did not think they could do anything more rational or more right than to embody the sentiments of our cemeteries and churchyards in a memorial of the same nature<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/9, Spratling Correspondence, letters from B.Mercado to G.King, 29 Sept. 1921 and 1 Oct. 1921

<sup>38</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 14 Oct. 1921, letter from J.S.May

<sup>39</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 2 July 1920

F.Richards of Islington argued that, 'a noble piece of sculpture would be the best anodyne and inspiration',<sup>40</sup>, and a letter to The Glasgow Herald said that a memorial should be 'a thing designed simply to keep the memory of our heroes before the eyes of our children and our children's children, as a continual reminder of the greatness of the stock they have sprung from and of what is therefore to be expected of them',<sup>41</sup>.

Other people implied that utilities were no less effective as expressions of feeling or as stimuli to appropriate ideas. The Royal Northern Hospital's advertisement, commending itself as the most appropriate memorial for Islington, claimed that an extension of its buildings would be 'a direct and tangible expression of sympathy' for the bereaved, and a constant reminder to them of the borough's gratitude to those they had lost<sup>42</sup>. A resident of Carlisle thought that widening an existing road bridge would be a suitable memorial because it would evoke gratitude to the dead: 'the gratitude of those who are compelled to use the bridge in its present condition would be boundless',<sup>43</sup>.

The public was often encouraged to choose a memorial according to criteria the dead themselves would have applied. The mayor of Carlisle wanted the first public meeting called to discuss a town memorial to consider the dead and 'try to think what their wishes would have been if they could have been consulted'. He thought they would not have wanted large sums spent on 'comparatively useless' things, by which he meant monuments<sup>44</sup>. Alderman Vorley of

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<sup>40</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 30 Aug. 1918

<sup>41</sup> Glasgow Herald, 17 Jan. 1919, letter from L.Burges

<sup>42</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 1 Apr. 1919

<sup>43</sup> Carlisle Journal, 22 Nov. 1918, letter from J.Couch

<sup>44</sup> Carlisle Journal, 28 Mar. 1919



Islington wrote to the press in support of a proposal to provide new facilities for the Royal Northern Hospital as the memorial and concluded by asking readers what they thought the dead themselves would have wanted. Councillor Mills thought that supporting the hospital extension would carry on the good work of the dead in 'helping their fellow creatures and leaving the world a better place than they found it',<sup>45</sup>. However, the same argument could be used in support of the opposite view. A writer to The Carlisle Journal thought that to couple a tribute to the dead with a town improvement which would benefit the public at large would not show 'the same unselfish spirit' as the dead<sup>46</sup>.

It was also argued that a memorial ought to stimulate those who saw it to follow the example of service and self-sacrifice set by the dead. Again, either a monument or a utility might serve this purpose. Lord Leverhulme maintained that responsible citizenship and the continuation of the work of the dead would be fulfilled by the monument proposed for his company village at Port Sunlight. He put this case to a general meeting of Lever Brothers' staff:

The nation, community or village group who failed to appreciate adequately great deeds of devotion and sacrifice would fail to produce in succeeding generations citizens capable of similar deeds of sacrifice, heroism and devotion. The most certain way of carrying on the great work for freedom undertaken in the present war was fittingly and impressively to record in letters of bronze on an imperishable monument the name of everyone connected with us who had gone out to this war<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 23 Sept. 1918

<sup>46</sup> Carlisle Journal, 25 Apr. 1919, letter from T.W. Winthrop

<sup>47</sup> Progress, July 1918, p.78

By contrast, an article in The Times in 1917 argued that 'our gratitude will show itself best in some effort to preserve for after times the things which our soldier's sacrifices have saved for us', but a monument rarely 'stimulates us to further their work'<sup>48</sup>. The writer proposed the institution at public schools of memorial prizes for essays on current affairs to encourage a sense of political responsibility. To preserve what the dead had fought for, the writer thought, it was necessary that the issues which had moved them to act as they did should be properly understood. The names of the dead could be kept before the eyes of future scholars by reproducing the school's memorial tablet on the bookplate in books given as prizes. A Glasgow writer believed that a new university or school of citizenship as a war memorial would 'further the high ideals for which our men died'<sup>49</sup>.

People did not confine themselves to any one argument in favour of their preferred type of memorial. In August 1918 F. Richards of Islington argued in favour of a monumental memorial for the borough because a visual image could most effectively address people's feelings: '"Who gains the eyes gains all" is a true saying, and in nothing more so than when we wish to comfort the emotions'<sup>50</sup>. A fortnight later he accepted that a hospital extension would be a good memorial, but was still keen that there should be a monument. He appealed then to civic pride and commercial advantage. Beautifying the borough would improve commerce, and commemorating the dead was an opportunity for local people to show off 'our devotion to duty and our regard for art'<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Times, 12 Sept. 1917

<sup>49</sup> Glasgow Herald, 10 Jan. 1919

<sup>50</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 30 Aug. 1918

<sup>51</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 11 Sept. 1918



Arguments about the purpose of a memorial could not alone rule any type in or out. They were presented in the public discussion to demonstrate that particular proposals were appropriate, and that they would perform whatever requirement a memorial might be expected to satisfy. They show us how people thought about memorials, but they were of limited use in resolving the contemporary difficulty of agreeing upon the forms they should take. Public debates served, rather, to get the local community as a whole to take an interest in a memorial project, to make its members feel that it really was their memorial and that they were involved in making it, and to find out which type of memorial would receive the most support.

Some practical considerations had an important influence on local choices. Committee members at the Gloucestershire village of Stratton thought that a club room and library was an excellent idea in principle, but that the building 'would not be made good use of, Stratton being so near Cirencester', and they decided against it<sup>52</sup>. In villages where the local income was limited, any utilitarian project would have to be cheap, most probably a very basic village hall. If a new parish hall had recently been built, any predisposition amongst local people to favour a social facility over a monument might be reduced, although some other cheap options were available, such as bowling greens or bus shelters. At Scaleby in Cumberland, the elderly Sir Robert Allison, one of several large landowners in the district, regular chairman of the parish council and of the war memorial committee, had presented the village with a hall in 1895<sup>53</sup>. The war memorial chosen for the village was a celtic cross to stand in front of it. Great Salkeld, also in Cumberland, had received a reading room and library

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<sup>52</sup> Gloucestershire, P319a PC 35/1, sheet of minutes, Stratton War Memorial Committee, min. 29 Dec. 1917

<sup>53</sup> Kelly's Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland, 1921

in 1895 from R. Heywood Thompson, one of the district's principal landowners. The building was extended in 1912, and endowed with an additional £500 in 1917<sup>54</sup>. The village war memorial committee, of which Heywood Thompson was chairman, also chose a cross.

However, the need to improve existing facilities might prompt the choice of a better version of a utility which was already present. The village of Steep in Hampshire already had a village club<sup>55</sup> before the war memorial was chosen, but the parish decided on a new hall and a new cross-class village association to go with it. One reason why Bethnal Green war memorial committee decided in favour of a children's section in the borough library was that a £15,000 grant for a new library was available from the Carnegie Foundation on the condition that £5000 was found locally<sup>56</sup>.

Similar practical considerations could be significant in towns with far larger resources. The Beckett Hospital in Barnsley was well supported through the District Hospital Fund in 1919 and 1920, during the early stages of organisation for the town war memorial. It had received £3457 and £5848 in those two years respectively from this source alone. The Barnsley Chronicle praised the Fund for 'an efficiently organised crusade'<sup>57</sup>, to which working class organisations had made a substantial contribution. In an editorial about the town memorial, the paper said the hospital appeal had been so successful that it no longer needed support from the memorial fund<sup>58</sup>. At a public

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Kelly's Directory of Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorsetshire, 1920

<sup>56</sup> Tower Hamlets, 082.3, min. 17 July 1919

<sup>57</sup> Barnsley Chronicle, 22 May 1920

<sup>58</sup> Barnsley Chronicle, 24 July 1920



meeting to choose a memorial, a technical school and ex-servicemen's housing were proposed, but rejected as having no great public appeal and as too costly. The meeting wanted something 'that will appeal to everybody',<sup>59</sup> and decided to devote the money to a statue to stand outside the projected new town hall.

Circumstances were the opposite at Islington. The borough had a permanent shrine available for remembrance ceremonies or private devotions on Islington Green, provided privately, before the end of the war. Another monument as the official memorial for the borough never became a serious contender in the memorial committee's discussions, although some residents were in favour of one. The final choice was between a new town hall and an extension of the Royal Northern Hospital whose claims were supported by many councillors as both worthy and necessitous. It is quite likely that promises from wealthy subscribers also influenced the choice. At the public meeting which finally adopted the hospital as beneficiary of the borough memorial fund, Lord Northampton pledged his financial support only to the hospital. As he could be expected to make a substantial donation, this may have helped to sway the decision, along with pledges from Councillor Mills to raise £1000 pounds for the hospital, and from another resident to donate £1000 to it<sup>60</sup>.

### 3. The Management of Choice

One way of ensuring a generally acceptable choice was to devote the memorial fund to a variety of purposes, providing something to satisfy everyone. Many communities divided their funds between a monumental and a charitable project,

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<sup>59</sup> Barnsley Chronicle, 31 July 1920

<sup>60</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 2 Apr. 1919

and also allowed subscribers to the fund to earmark their donations for one or other of the chosen objects if they so wished. On the day that Lewisham war memorial fund was launched, the memorial committee announced that it proposed to erect a monument, already designed and to cost about £2000, and give the balance of the money raised to local hospitals<sup>61</sup>. Of over £7000 collected by Deptford war memorial fund, around £1800 was allocated to three monuments in various parts of the borough and £5000 to the local hospital<sup>62</sup>. The objects of Camberwell war memorial fund were '(a) To erect a permanent memorial to commemorate those from the Borough of Camberwell who have made the supreme sacrifice; (b) To provide and equip a Club and Workshops for discharged sailors and soldiers; and (c) to provide (if funds permit) such further records as the Committee may determine...'<sup>63</sup>. The Lord Provost of Glasgow recommended 'that the fund...should be devoted in the first place to the erection of a Cenotaph and then to the Prince Albert workshops [an institution for disabled ex-servicemen], any surplus to such causes as the committee determined'<sup>64</sup>. Over £103,700 was eventually raised, of which £60,362 was earmarked for the workshops only. Of the remainder, £22,115 was spent on the cenotaph, the balance going largely to military charities<sup>65</sup>.

The desire to satisfy all points of view need not entail providing several different types of memorial. It was

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<sup>61</sup> Kentish Mercury, 16 May 1920

<sup>62</sup> Metropolitan Borough of Deptford, Minutes of Proceedings, v.21, p.65, min. 11 Jan. 1921

<sup>63</sup> Greater London Record Office, PC/CHA/3-5, London County Council War Charities Act Register, 788, Borough of Camberwell War Memorial (registered 19 Dec. 1918)

<sup>64</sup> Strathclyde, G4.1, Glasgow War Memorial, min. 20 Feb. 1920

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. min. 14 Jan. 1926, final account of the fund.



possible to conceive of a single structure which would combine a variety of desirable qualities. Editorials in the Carlisle Journal argued in favour of a memorial hall for the city - something like the Free Trade Hall in Manchester - as it would combine 'practical utility and permanency', and opposed the corporation's initial proposal for alms-houses which 'cannot by any degree of ingenuity be made to constitute a permanent and notable memorial'<sup>66</sup>. The purpose of the memorial was 'to establish a permanent record of the services of the men who have fought and fallen in the great struggle for liberty and righteousness' and if an architectural monument which achieved this could be combined with something 'of a practical and useful character, so much the better'. A public hall, the paper said, would come nearest to meeting these requirements<sup>67</sup>.

In a number of letters to the press, A.E.J. Millie presented a scheme for Islington which ought to have satisfied almost all of the relevant criteria<sup>68</sup>. He argued that the most satisfying solution for the bereaved would be a new town hall, with the names of the dead in a monumental vestibule, placed centrally in the borough. Such a structure would be preferable to a mass of memorials to individuals, because grander and more permanent. A fund raised for this purpose would tap a unique source of finance and could provide the basis for development of an office complex connected to the town hall to provide adequate business accommodation for professional people in the borough, and incidentally cover the running costs of the town hall through the rents its occupants paid. A didactic statue would complete the ensemble, consisting of peace with a laurel wreath 'in reverence' on a globe supported by an airman, a soldier, a

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<sup>66</sup> Carlisle Journal, 14 Mar. 1919

<sup>67</sup> Carlisle Journal, 28 Mar. 1919

<sup>68</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 19 Aug. 1918; 26 Aug. 1918; 12 Sept. 1918

sailor and a munitions worker. The globe should show 'the countries of the Allies in prominence and a dark shadow, as it were, over the Central Powers',<sup>69</sup>.

Where there was no such compromise between opposed opinions, a means of arbitration was required which all interested parties would respect. The most obvious and usual was a committee or public meeting recognised as representative of the whole community, making decisions by majority vote. This was an important benefit of the public participation which memorial committees normally encouraged. Other ways of consulting the public were sometimes proposed. A Stoke Newington policeman suggested a ballot of ratepayers<sup>70</sup>. At Sleaford three proposals were notified to all subscribers who voted by post. (1022 votes were returned)<sup>71</sup>. In rural communities personal contact between individuals might provide satisfactory information about local opinion. At Brancepeth the memorial committee resolved that 'when collecting subscriptions we should ascertain the wishes of parishioners as to what the memorial should be and where it should be placed',<sup>72</sup>.

But public consultation was not simply a way of ascertaining the will of the community. Where a factional struggle occurred, it also offered committee organisers an opportunity for manipulating the decision-making process to get the result they wanted. A second target for manipulation was the memorial fund, as money had such an important place in a memorial committee's work. In the factional rivalry at Stoke Newington, committee members resorted to both of these manoeuvres. Stoke Newington

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<sup>69</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 26 Aug. 1918

<sup>70</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/25, cutting dated 20 June 1919

<sup>71</sup> Lincolnshire, SLUDC 11/6, mins. 20 Feb. 1920 and 9 Mar. 1920

<sup>72</sup> Durham, D/Br/E 447, min. 10 Dec. 1919



council did not, at first, encourage public participation in the choice of their memorial, and subsequently there were serious difficulties in raising a sufficiently large fund. The council had set up a sub-committee of its own to choose a memorial for the borough, and so had tried to keep the final decision in its own hands. The Hackney and Kingsland Gazette believed this procedure would be approved 'by all who desire to avoid friction and to rally the wholehearted support of residents in aid of any scheme decided by a majority of the council, whatever this may be'<sup>73</sup>.

Unfortunately, the absence of formal public involvement left councillors vulnerable to the criticism that they were trying to foist their own preference on the citizens without consulting them. When the sub-committee recommended that a new monumental entrance for the borough library be built as the war memorial, Alderman Dod and a number of other councillors opposed the scheme. Dod went so far as to write to the press to suggest that a boys' club would be a preferable alternative, and asked members of the public to make their views known. It was, he said, in the public's interest to do so, as it would have to pay for what was done, either through the rates or by subscription to a memorial fund<sup>74</sup>. The Gazette expressed surprise that a councillor should break ranks in this way, and warned that if alternative schemes were promoted many people would take the differences of opinion as an excuse not to subscribe<sup>75</sup>. Two debates, in March and May 1919, revealed acrimonious divisions within the council on the issue. At the first of these, Dod had a long altercation with Herbert Ormond, the

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<sup>73</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 17 Mar. 1919

<sup>74</sup> Hackney Archives, SN/W/1/25, cutting 28 Feb. 1919

<sup>75</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 5 Mar. 1919

mayor, and was himself accused of trying to get a special hearing for his own project to found a boys' institute<sup>76</sup>.

Several councillors appealed for unity, insisted that 'any memorial should have the stamp of public approval on it', and proposed that 'persons outside the council' should be invited to join the committee<sup>77</sup>. In the second debate two proposals - the library entrance and 'a simple form of Monument' proposed by Councillor King<sup>78</sup> - drew equal numbers of votes<sup>79</sup>. One councillor protested at the 'mental atmosphere' of the meeting and said that 'petty jealousy' had intruded into it<sup>80</sup>. The Gazette thought the atmosphere had been 'anything but in keeping with the dignity of the subject under discussion'<sup>81</sup>. As a result, the council had to reconstitute the memorial committee so that half its members were from outside the council, and put the disputed proposals to a town meeting. The paper thought this manoeuvre 'one of the most abject confessions of incompetence and lack of discrimination on the part of a public body' that it had seen for some time<sup>82</sup>. At the town meeting Dod kept up his attack, insisting that the 'unsaid message of the dead' was to commemorate them by doing something useful<sup>83</sup>, but the library entrance received the approval of a majority.

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<sup>76</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 21 Mar. 1919

<sup>77</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 19 Mar. 1919

<sup>78</sup> Hackney, SN/W1/11, suggestion 6

<sup>79</sup> Hackney, SN/W1/25, cutting 23 May 1919

<sup>80</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 23 May 1919

<sup>81</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 23 May 1919

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 20 June 1919



The struggle was continued in attempts to control the use of the memorial fund. In November 1919 the fund was not yet adequate for the library entrance. One of the committee members suggested that the scheme was receiving little financial support because it was unpopular and proposed that it should be reconsidered<sup>84</sup>. Francis Dod was now mayor, and hence *ex-officio* chairman of the memorial committee. He suggested that 'a more popular appeal should be made which would attract the general Public'<sup>85</sup>. He proposed to hold a lottery, with tickets for sale to the public and prizes donated by local residents. None of the other committee members approved. Councillor King thought a simple monument would be better than 'an elaborate building raised by such means', and another that 'instead of obtaining from the Borough an expression of its gratitude, we would be appealing to the cupidity of mankind'<sup>86</sup>. Nonetheless, by the end of January 1920 the financial situation was no better and the majority had come round to Dod's idea<sup>87</sup>, so the lottery was held.

By February 1921 there was still not enough money. Dod, no longer mayor, suggested the choice of memorial should be reconsidered by a public meeting, and he had the support of the town clerk. In response, the supporters of the library entrance proposed a revised and cheaper version of their project<sup>88</sup>. The town clerk thought the reduced library scheme was now insufficiently imposing to have any value as a memorial. Dod thought it would be better to do something for the war widows<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/1, min. 13 Nov. 1919

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. min. 24 Nov. 1919

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. min. 30 Jan. 1920

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. min. 4 Feb. 1921

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. min. 23 Feb 1921

As Dod had raised a large proportion of the available money himself, through the lottery, it remained up to him and his allies to decide what could be done with it. He had obtained prizes for the raffle on condition, he said, that he did his best to prevent the library scheme from going ahead<sup>90</sup>. He had an obligation to the donors and could not commit himself without consulting them. He wanted the committee to hold a public meeting of subscribers and prize-givers, but no other members would support the idea. In an attempt to get round the difficulty which Dod presented, the committee expressed its appreciation 'that he has used his best efforts to have the memorial take the shape of some form other than the Memorial Entrance' in a formal resolution<sup>91</sup>. A private meeting of subscribers and prize-givers was then proposed and Dod agreed to be bound by its decision. The committee later decided to limit the meeting to people who had subscribed over ten shillings, a move which Dod and Councillor King, who was in favour of a cheaper monument, unsuccessfully opposed<sup>92</sup>.

The public knew that the subscribers' meeting was part of a power struggle. We have already seen how the local British Legion branch expressed its concern that the committee was trying to manipulate the outcome. Another resident wrote to the mayor the day before the meeting to warn that 'a small section of the Council will make a determined attempt...to capture the war memorial fund'. He urged the committee to make a determined defence of its position 'or the whole thing will be upset. It was upon the Committee's original proposal that the subscriptions were given'. He hoped to attend the meeting 'to support that proposal'<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. min. 28 Feb. 1921

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. min. 23 Feb. 1921

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. mins. 23 Feb. 1921 and 22 June 1921

<sup>93</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/9, letter from A. Chalmers, 3 Oct. 1921, (emphasis in the original).



When the meeting was convened, early in October 1921, Dod opened the argument by moving that the whole matter be referred to an open public meeting. He was defeated, and two memorial proposals were put to the meeting: the library entrance and King's 'simple but impressive unsculptured monument' which would leave the lottery money and any surplus to go to charity. A third was moved from the floor: that the memorial should 'take the form of some material assistance to local charities'. An amended motion carried the day: that the library entrance be the memorial with any surplus going to charity. Thus the principle of giving to charity was included to pacify critics, although the amount available would not be large<sup>94</sup>.

Not everyone was satisfied with the decision. Giving such privilege in the decision-making process to those donors who had the most money to give was very much against the egalitarian spirit of the commemoration of the dead. A member of the British Legion branch, who was also a vocal allotment holder<sup>95</sup>, so perhaps an active ally of Francis Dod, wrote to the press to complain about the restrictions which had been placed on admission to the subscribers' meeting. 'A more un-Britishlike action, by holding a packed meeting, one would fail to discover'<sup>96</sup>, he said. He challenged the moral right of certain people at the meeting to take part in it:

If my remembrance serves me correct, at least two of the privileged subscribers, who left at the close of the meeting, were, to my knowledge, exempted from service, and if they had given all their worldly

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<sup>94</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/1, min. 4 Oct. 1921

<sup>95</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 4 Jan 1918, letter from J.S.May

<sup>96</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 14 Oct. 1921, letter from J.S.May

possessions, it would have been little sacrifice to the toll many paid, or the broken health of many who returned.

But at least it was a decision, and it was finally accepted. As the Legion's principal object had been to ensure that a memorial was built at all, the branch did not challenge the outcome. The same correspondent added, 'I hope the final settlement will be carried out faithfully to the letter'<sup>97</sup>.

This was not quite the end of the dispute. Councillor King made one last attempt to overturn the decision of the subscribers' meeting and to substitute a cheaper monument, but no-one seconded it. Neither Dod nor the town clerk, who had both opposed the library project, and were both present at this meeting, supported King<sup>98</sup>. In January 1922, Councillor Sheffield, who was the committee's main contact with the honorary architect, moved that, if finances permitted, more stone decoration should be included in the building. Dod tried to convince the committee that there had been a cash limit on how much could be spent on it. There was then an argument about the minutes during which the secretary threatened to resign, withdrew the threat, and all sides protested at each other's behaviour. But the decision had now been firmly made, and it stood<sup>99</sup>. Once a decision which carried public authority had been taken, dissidents had little alternative to acquiescing in it. Otherwise they could be accused of preventing the community from properly honouring its dead.

In some other places, too, it is possible to find battles for control of the resources for a memorial. At Wigton, Cumberland, in 1919, the district council convened a public

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/1, min. 17 Oct. 1921

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. mins. 30 Jan. 1922 and 17 July 1922



meeting about a memorial and put forward the idea of a recreation ground. This was criticised in emotional terms by Mr Dazeley the headmaster of a local school, who said that having 'to wait until young fellows laid down their lives before a recreation ground could be provided' should be an intense embarrassment to the council, to the support of 'loud cheers',<sup>100</sup>. A rival meeting was convened by the local branch of the Discharged Sailors and Soldiers Association with Mr Dazeley in the chair, and many relatives of the dead present. Providing a recreation ground as a war memorial was condemned as 'a shabby way out'. Joseph Donald maintained that 'a large body of opinion' amongst the relatives of the dead wanted 'a monument of imperishable stone',<sup>101</sup>.

Members of the council resisted this proposal at first, saying that the decision had been made by a war memorial committee on which there were some councillors, not by the council itself, and that the idea of the memorial was not merely to commemorate the dead, but to honour all who had served. They suggested that the Association branch was being manipulated for political ends<sup>102</sup>. The Association strongly denied the charge at its next meeting<sup>103</sup>. Joseph Donald then made an implicit appeal to a sense of unity and respect for grief. He said it was 'a great pity that practical unanimity could not be reached in a matter of this kind and that the Council should try to thrust a scheme upon the town which was not acceptable to a very large body of the people and more especially to the relatives of those who had fallen',<sup>104</sup>. He feared the council would refuse to let

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<sup>100</sup> Carlisle Journal, 16 May 1919

<sup>101</sup> Carlisle Journal, 30 May 1919

<sup>102</sup> Carlisle Journal, 20 June 1919

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

them have a site for a monument. A compromise was finally reached in which the memorial fund was shared between the recreation ground and a monument<sup>105</sup>.

At Enfield, in 1919, a dispute arose over whether money raised during the war by the Enfield Patriotic Committee to support local men at the front and their dependents, and afterwards to commemorate those who had been killed, should be put towards the construction of a cenotaph or the re-endowment of Enfield Cottage Hospital. The latter was the official choice as district war memorial. The dispute turned on interpretations of minutes and of the wishes of the original subscribers to the fund. The Patriotic Committee's former chairman went so far as to threaten its current officers with an injunction<sup>106</sup>.

Personal animosity, probably with a political origin, was present here. John McEwan, a leading local Liberal, whose wife stood as Liberal candidate in the 1919 general election<sup>107</sup>, was outgoing chairman of the Patriotic Committee. He wanted the balance of its funds passed on to the hospital. The treasurer of this committee, who wanted the money put towards a cenotaph, was H.F.Bowles, Conservative MP for the constituency. His opinion of McEwan may be gathered from his remark in a meeting of the management committee of the cottage hospital that, knowing McEwan's determination, he probably would serve his threatened injunction and see all the fund's money used up in legal fees<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>105</sup> Carlisle Journal, 1 Aug. 1919

<sup>106</sup> Enfield Gazette, 26 Dec. 1919

<sup>107</sup> Enfield Gazette, 22 Nov. 1918

<sup>108</sup> Enfield Gazette, 26 Dec. 1919



There was also a more general political division. A trade union representative, also on the hospital management committee, was in favour of giving the money to the hospital. Dr Ridge, leader of the hospital's medical staff<sup>109</sup>, was, like McEwan, a prominent Liberal<sup>110</sup>. He too argued that the money should go to the hospital. However, neither of these men were officers of the Patriotic Committee. Those who, with Bowles, were in favour of a cenotaph included two Conservative councillors<sup>111</sup>, the chairman of the town Constitutional Club<sup>112</sup>, and an organiser of the local Discharged Sailors and Soldiers Association branch<sup>113</sup>, all of whom were Patriotic Committee members. Those who wanted the money devoted to a cenotaph seem to have been predominantly from the political right, although the representative of the local tradesmen's associations, who could well have been a Conservative, said he had always understood the money was intended for the hospital<sup>114</sup>. In the end, supporters of a cenotaph got the better of the dispute, largely because they were already in possession of the money.

Stoke Newington was in some respects an unusual case, but only to the extent that an initial miscalculation on the part of the borough council - the decision to keep the choice of memorial to itself, without public consultation - had to be rectified later. The bitter quarrel developed as the civic leaders tried to adopt the more usual system by

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> I owe much of the information about local personalities to Mr Graham Dalling, Enfield Local History Librarian.

<sup>111</sup> Enfield Gazette, 12 Dec. 1919

<sup>112</sup> Enfield Gazette, 26 Dec. 1919

<sup>113</sup> Enfield Gazette, 5 Dec. 1919

<sup>114</sup> Enfield Gazette, 26 Dec. 1919

which choice was legitimated through public participation. As we saw in chapter 1<sup>115</sup>, the predominant part played by civic leaders in providing a memorial for the community was normally obscured by the offer of participation to the public, by encouraging discussion of what should be done, and by referring important decisions to widely representative committees or directly to public meetings. Local leaders were then left to get on with the business undisturbed in sub-committees, so long as they were seen to be acting in the community's interests. The breakdown of this system at Stoke Newington shows how thoroughly the usual method of producing a war memorial was part of the local political process. Choosing the memorial there had become too open to manage in a way that would give the conventional impression of unanimity and responsible leadership. In order to regain control of it, all the weapons of political faction-fighting had to be employed.

#### 4. The Local Politics of Commemoration

Committees made a point of trying to interest the local public in their work. How did the public respond? Chapter 1 section 3<sup>116</sup> suggested how difficult many memorial committees found the raising of a fund adequate to their plans. They had to use all the normal devices of charity campaigns, which ranged from playing on the sense of guilt to holding lotteries with attractive prizes, to extract what they needed from the public. A number of committees even had difficulty collecting the names of people who should be listed on the memorial. After putting up notices in Post Offices and elsewhere, and advertising for names in local papers, the committee organisers at Llandrindod Wells, Hoylake and Stoke Newington still had to go to considerable

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<sup>115</sup> See pp. 53-54

<sup>116</sup> See pp. 50-52



trouble to get names which had not been voluntarily submitted<sup>117</sup>. The level of interest in public meetings might also be disappointing. At Leeds only 20 people went to hear Sir Reginald Blomfield present details of the design he had been asked to prepare<sup>118</sup>. The Barnsley Chronicle judged the attendance for the public meeting to form a town memorial committee to be 'extremely disappointing'. There was disappointment, too, at the turnout for similar meetings at Carlisle, where only 60 attended, and Blennerhasset, Cumberland<sup>119</sup>. Although, as we saw in Chapter 1<sup>120</sup>, many members of the public were interested in the ceremonies held in remembrance of the dead, it does not seem that a high proportion wished to be involved in the actual business of erecting memorials to them. In villages, where it was easier to approach people personally<sup>121</sup>, and decisions could be taken at parish meetings which were a regular part of local political activity, a higher proportion of the population may have been involved.

Who made the important decisions about war memorials? Chapter 1 section 2<sup>122</sup> showed that urban war memorial committees were formed from representatives of the local interest groups which normally featured in the political and institutional lives of communities, and section 4<sup>123</sup> discussed the leading roles in both urban and rural

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<sup>117</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, file 3, letter 16 Jan. 1922; Wirral, ZWO/16, min. 11 Mar. 1922; Hackney, SN/W/1/7, Additions and Corrections. Memorial organisers asked for lists from local churches when the response to a public appeal for names was poor.

<sup>118</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 2 July 1920

<sup>119</sup> Carlisle Journal, 11 Mar. 1919 and 28 Mar. 1919

<sup>120</sup> See pp.27-28

<sup>121</sup> See p.151

<sup>122</sup> See pp.42-45

<sup>123</sup> See pp.53-57

committees taken by the local political and cultural élite. These were people who had experience of running institutions, held positions which gave them command of suitable resources, led the religious denominations, and patronised philanthropic and educational causes. Special sub-committees charged with choosing a memorial or with choosing options to be put before the public were staffed by them. Even where the final choice of a memorial, and other important decisions about it, had to be ratified by an open public meeting, rather than by a general committee composed of local politicians and pressure groups, it was the committee members who set the agenda and presented the evidence on which the public decision was made. It seems likely, too, from the relatively small attendances, that a large proportion of the people who attended public meetings were committee members and their allies. There can be little doubt that the decision-making process was in the hands of a relatively small number of people, and that those were the local civic leaders, leaders of voluntary associations and of local churches. In this, the process was not distinct from other local political activities.

I have argued that the preferences for different types of memorial held by individuals, and the contributions they made to decisions about them, were prompted to a large extent by their roles in local society<sup>124</sup>. While they applied to memorials ideas which were derived from their attitudes to national politics or to moral issues which had been the subject of national campaigns, the application of them was deeply affected by considerations of their own local standing, their local reputation and their sense of responsibility to the community.

In urban memorial committees, community leaders expressed their devotion to local concerns, and to the adequate

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<sup>124</sup> See pp.127-129



performance of their social roles in the locality, through the importance they attached to local patriotism and civic pride. They urged the public to see that their community did not fall behind others in honouring their dead. Fred Hall MP, a leading member of Barnsley war memorial committee, was making a typical point when he said he 'sometimes thought Barnsley was going to be the last in the field in the way of doing something to perpetuate the memories of those noble men and women who gave their all',<sup>125</sup>. Colonel Mitchell added that the neighbouring villages had schemes in preparation or under way and 'it was up to Barnsley now to do their bit',<sup>126</sup>. Local leaders also insisted that the community should produce a memorial which matched its sense of its own dignity. The special committee on a war memorial set up by Bradford city council was instructed 'to find the basis of an agreed proposal for making the object of a War memorial worthy of the City',<sup>127</sup>. In the small country town of Sleaford, too, the committee expressed concern that the memorial should be 'worthy of the town',<sup>128</sup>.

In the early twentieth century, the idea of civic pride had quite specific political implications. It was connected with an ideal of non-party activism in the cause of urban improvement, and the preservation of social unity through administration which pursued rational policies, derived from concern for the common good, rather than those of partisan politicians. To promote these causes, civic societies were formed in many large towns, in the years just before and after the First World War. Their prime movers were business leaders, local professionals and academics. They relied

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<sup>125</sup> Barnsley Chronicle, 31 July 1920

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Bradford, Bradford Corporation Finance and General Purposes Committee Minute Book 54, min. 6 Mar. 1919

<sup>128</sup> Lincolnshire, SLUDC 11/6, min. 21 Feb. 1920

strongly on ideas developed by the growing movement of professional town planners, and regarded the aesthetic improvement of the town environment, which extended from anti-litter campaigns to the promotion of high quality architecture, as an important contribution to the improvement of social conditions and the consolidation of social harmony<sup>129</sup>.

The political ideals of the civic societies in this period were expressed by the London Society in 1913, in its conviction that urban problems required 'close and patient study from sympathetic and disinterested enthusiasts'<sup>130</sup>, and by the town planning pioneer Patrick Abercrombie in 1920, when he complained that 'National and Imperial Politics still enter far too largely into the choice of our councillors', and as a result, 'a non-party and non-sectarian society can exercise a useful function' in local politics<sup>131</sup>. Civic pride was regarded as an important weapon in the work of these societies. Pride in one's town would encourage loyalty to it and the desire to serve it and promote its well-being. Leeds Civic Society coupled urban improvement with a wish to preserve the city's status. It intended that, through its efforts, 'the City of Leeds should be a more desirable place in which to live and transact business, and that it should maintain its place in Yorkshire and the Country at large, as one of the most up to date and enlightened cities in the Kingdom'<sup>132</sup>. Neville Chamberlain told Birmingham Civic Society that it should

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<sup>129</sup> See A.M.King, Urban Improvement and Public Pressure: The Civic Society Movement c.1902-1930, unpublished dissertation for MSc. in History of Modern Architecture, University College, London 1987

<sup>130</sup> London Society Journal, n.1, Oct. 1913, p.2

<sup>131</sup> P.Abercrombie, 'A Civic Society, an Outline of its Scope, Formation and Functions', Town Planning Review, v.8, n.2, Apr. 1920, p.80

<sup>132</sup> Leeds Civic Society, Annual Report, 1919, p.3



stimulate pride in the city and encourage 'citizens to make some personal contribution to public service',<sup>133</sup>.

Appeals to civic pride, therefore, should not be seen simply as a way of encouraging public interest in a memorial scheme. It was part of a collection of linked ideas which involved social unity, loyalty to one's locality, and disinterested service to the community. It was part of a distinctively urban political strategy intended to cope with the problems of urban society outside the party political system. It was used particularly by those who favoured a combination of political interests, probably against the threat of socialism in the post-war world, but also out of a feeling that the old system of party politics was disastrously corrupt and that war had provided an opportunity to clear it away. In national politics this could be expressed as patriotism, and in local politics as local patriotism or civic pride. In connection with war memorials, this kind of exhortation was confined, on the whole, to towns, which suggests further that it was part of the repertoire of a characteristically urban political rhetoric.

Although appeals to local patriotism and rivalry with other places do not appear in the records of rural war memorial committees, they shared a number of the concerns shown in towns, especially the promotion of social harmony. Some wanted to provide opportunities for an improved leisure and cultural life in the form of village halls, or health in the form of nursing care, but they were less inclined to discuss the major changes taking place at national level in social policies such as housing and education. In contrast to the towns, rural communities showed stronger concern with their religious divisions, whether these were manifested in a desire to preserve the distinctive values and interests of

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<sup>133</sup> Birmingham Post, 10 Jan. 1922

the different denominations or to keep the peace between them. The stress on interdenominational co-operation over a memorial, or on the provision of non-denominational social facilities, may have served in rural communities the same purpose as appeals to civic pride and loyalty in towns.



## Chapter 5

## Conventions of War Memorial Art

I have already argued that commemoration was conducted according to a number of conventions. It looked to precedent for its form of organisation, and there were expectations derived from past practice about the roles people should play in it. The forms of memorial which might be erected were also subject to convention. Tradition offered a variety of suitable objects, and where works of art were chosen, these were usually executed according to well-established conventions of type and style<sup>1</sup>.

In using the term 'convention' I do not wish to suggest that the forms and meanings of commemorative art were simply given by tradition. Where familiar forms, such as the cross or obelisk, were used, they acquired connotations relating them specifically to the recent war which were new to them. Traditional types of monument were also adapted, through new stylistic variations on them, to give them special relevance to the war. Innovative forms could also be introduced and acquire the status of conventions by entering the canon of generally recognised monumental types. This chapter considers how appropriate connotations became attached to existing monumental forms, and how innovations were made in the monumental repertoire. It also considers how some widely disseminated aesthetic ideas, shared between artists, connoisseurs and ordinary members of the public, allowed experts and non-experts alike to join in discussions about the design and meaning of memorials.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed study of the forms of monumental art which have been applied to war see A.Borg, War memorials from Antiquity to the Present, London 1991

### 1. Traditional Forms and Contemporary Meaning

Traditional types of monument carried connotations both of locality and occasion. The cross, for example, which was used for a great many war memorials, was associated with the churchyard and death, also with village centres and hence with the rural community. As a religious symbol, the cross had been regarded with suspicion in England for much of the time since the Reformation, but nineteenth century archaeologists and local historians had revived interest in it as a form of monument associated with historic rural communities<sup>2</sup>. The restoration of village crosses was a minor Victorian movement which accompanied the better-known vogue for church restoration<sup>3</sup>.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the use of ritual and symbols had become increasingly acceptable in Anglican worship, and the cross joined the traditional head stone as a common funerary monument. Crosses, sometimes celtic to avoid any Catholic associations, or even, rarely, a crucifix, had been used as memorials to the dead of the Boer War. York has an elaborate Eleanor cross, appropriate to a cathedral city, unveiled in 1905 (ill.14). The Durham Light Infantry Boer War memorial at Durham cathedral, adapts a celtic form (ill.15), and in the parish churchyard at Hawarden, Clwyd, there is a crucifix. However, even after the Great War, the use of the crucifix as a war memorial, though common, was still opposed by some Church of England administrators and congregations, and court cases were fought over it<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, William Crossing, Old Stone Crosses of the Dartmoor Borders, London 1892, and Alfred Pope, Old Stone Crosses of Dorset, London 1906.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Rimmer, Ancient Stone Crosses of England, London 1875, p.140; Churchman's Family Magazine, May 1863, p.596

<sup>4</sup> See Builder, v.120, 15 April 1921, p.485; Birmingham Mail, 10 Jan. 1922



The meaning of traditional monumental types was open to reinterpretation to suit the new context in which they were to be used. This occurred conspicuously in the case of the cross, mainly as a consequence of the use of Christian ideas in wartime propaganda. The cross thus acquired connotations relating it specifically to the war, which members of the public were likely to recognise immediately. It came to be particularly associated with the idea that death in the war was a superlative example of self-sacrifice<sup>5</sup>. The concept of sacrifice was already attached to the cross, in the form of Christ's redemptive sacrifice for humanity. In a study of ancient Dartmoor crosses, published in 1892, William Crossing wrote: 'An object that could turn the thoughts to an event of such importance as the great sacrifice once offered for mankind, was peculiarly fitted for setting up in such places as the wayfarer should pass'.<sup>6</sup> During the war, however, the term 'great sacrifice' had changed its meaning. It came to refer in most people's minds to the supposedly willing and generous laying down of their lives by soldiers in defence of their country and their ideals.

The connection between the deaths of soldiers and the redemptive sacrifice of Christ was made visually in a lithograph by James Clerk, published in the Graphic<sup>7</sup> at Christmas 1914, which became very popular<sup>8</sup> (ill.16). It coupled the image of a dead infantryman with that of Christ on the cross, and was entitled ambiguously 'The Great Sacrifice', leaving it uncertain whether the words refer to the dying Christ or the dead man. Queen Mary bought the original, and distributed copies of it as gifts to a number of parishes during the war. It was later used as part of

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter 7, p.238, for a further discussion of the importance of the idea of self-sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup> W.Crossing, Old Stone Crosses, p.xii

<sup>7</sup> The Graphic, 5 Dec. 1914

<sup>8</sup> See A.Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.191

Marner Street school's war memorial in Tower Hamlets<sup>9</sup>. Several still hang in churches today, one on the wall of Saint Cross Hospital chapel at Winchester, over a wooden battlefield cross, in memory of a parishioner. Street shrines also encouraged the association of military self-sacrifice with the cross. Amongst the patriotic symbols and lists of names, a cross could often be found, whether the shrine was home made or bought from a professional manufacturer. In some cases a crucifix was used, although the Evening News, in its promotion of shrines, discouraged it, regarding it as a sectarian symbol exclusive to Catholicism.

The cross was the most common form of free standing monument used for war memorials in this country. In 1921, Charles Jagger declared the cross 'has been, and probably always will be the symbol of the Great War' when proposing its use in one of his preliminary designs for the war memorial at Paddington Station<sup>10</sup>. The Bishop of London described it as 'the emblem of sacrifice' in his speech dedicating the war memorial cross at Saint Mary's church, Stoke Newington<sup>11</sup>. The idea of self-sacrifice was coupled with the Christian connotation of victory over death won through Christ's sacrifice. At the dedication of Brancepeth's war memorial cross, a traditional gothic design by W.H.Wood<sup>12</sup> (ill.17), the archdeacon who officiated said that the cross was a sign 'not of defeat but of victory over the last enemy', meaning death. Sometimes the ideas of spiritual and military

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<sup>9</sup> Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 30 Aug. 1916; East London Advertiser, 17 March 1917; London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Photos LH 85/16

<sup>10</sup> Public Record Office, RAIL 258/447, Report by J.Burnet, T.Tait, C.Jagger, 21 Feb. 1921

<sup>11</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 15 Oct. 1920

<sup>12</sup> Wood was an architect with a largely ecclesiastical practice, and a considerable reputation, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.



victory were merged. The Leeds suburb of Chapel Allerton proposed a stone crucifix as its memorial to the local war dead, whom it described in the inscription as 'The Unconquered'. It would 'be the emblem of their sacrifice, and...no less a sign of victory...It will, through the centuries, tell our children of the sacrifice that conquers'<sup>13</sup>.

The records of a significant number of (especially rural) memorial committees suggest that a cross was often chosen as a war memorial without much attention being given to alternative memorial forms. It would appear from this that many committee members readily saw the cross as a particularly appropriate form of memorial. They also saw it as an appropriate form for a ceremonial point in places where the main memorial was a substantial utilitarian building. When Wallsend war memorial committee accepted Sir George Hunter's offer of a memorial winter garden, its members remained 'convinced it would be advisable to include a memorial cross in the scheme'<sup>14</sup>. At South Shields the war memorial was a new hospital ward, but a cross was also erected just outside the hospital grounds.

An existing conventional type of monument could be given a new inflection to suit it more specifically to the commemoration of the war dead. This was achieved by establishing a visibly new version of its traditional form - a new style - intended to match the novelty of its post-war connotations, and recognised as such by clients and the general public. Reginald Blomfield created a new inflection of the cross in the design he provided for the military cemeteries to be built by the Imperial War Graves Commission (ill.18). His cross had a severe, unornamented form, an octagonal section with splayed ends to each limb, and a

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<sup>13</sup> Leeds City Library, LQP 940.465, appeal leaflet

<sup>14</sup> Newcastle Evening Chronicle 26 Jan. 1921

bronze sword pointing downwards on its face. It became known expressly as 'the Cross of Sacrifice',<sup>15</sup>. He explained the meaning he intended for his design in a speech at the opening of an exhibition of war memorial designs held by Leeds Civic Society in 1920. A memorial should 'speak of its own time', he said, for which 'an abstract statement of the purpose of the memorial' was necessary, in simple forms and without archaeological details. In his view 'runic monuments or gothic crosses had nothing to do with the grim terrors of the trenches',<sup>16</sup>.

Blomfield's insistence on simplicity and avoidance of ornament based on past styles accorded with a current of critical thinking which valued directness of statement and clarity of form. Commentators applied the criterion of simplicity to a variety of monumental types. A.C.Benson, poet and Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, used it as a universal standard of quality in his keynote address at the opening of the Civic Arts Association's exhibition of memorial designs in 1916. He criticised 'the pantomime of allegory', and recommended simplicity of statement 'so that the gazer can see at once that the matter recorded is great and significant and desires to know more',<sup>17</sup>.

Arthur Clutton-Brock, art critic of The Times, recommended simplicity in more ambitious structures as well. He thought cloisters were a form of memorial suitable for towns which could be treated in a simple style without attenuating their meaning as memorials. They needed no architectural embellishment, and clients should forget about the gothic style. A cloister's 'purport is plain enough...without

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<sup>15</sup> P.Longworth, The Unending Vigil, London 1985, p.36

<sup>16</sup> Yorkshire Post, 17 Apr. 1920

<sup>17</sup> A.C.Benson, Lest We Forget, London, 1917, pp.12 and 13.



architectural ornaments from the past', he wrote<sup>18</sup>. The Royal Academy of Art recommended that 'in all memorials simplicity, scale, and proportion should be aimed at, rather than profusion of detail or excessive costliness of material',<sup>19</sup>.

Simplicity had a moral meaning. A Civic Arts Association pamphlet on war shrines published in 1918 recommended simplicity because it conveyed sincerity. 'Neither magnitude nor magnificence can adequately express a nation's gratitude to its sons for the vast sacrifices they have made on its behalf. Such simple records, as these proposed and now being used,...meet the case in a much better way. They are impressive because they are sincere',<sup>20</sup>. Simplicity was also understood to represent an important and admirable quality in the dead themselves, making simple monuments especially appropriate for them. Discussing the London and North Western Railway's war memorial obelisk at Euston Station, the LNWR Gazette said, 'The simple grandeur of the structure corresponds with the simplicity and grandeur of those to whom it is raised...',<sup>21</sup>.

The liking for simplicity in commemorating the dead reached beyond the realm of specialist art criticism into newspapers and the opinions which private individuals expressed in war memorial committees. It was not applied only to permanent memorial structures, but to any acts and objects associated with the commemoration of the dead. The Evening News insisted that street shrines put up as a result of its fund-

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<sup>18</sup> A.Clutton-Brock, On War Memorials, London 1917, p.9

<sup>19</sup> 'Suggestions for the Treatment of War Memorials', Royal Academy, Annual Report 1918, p.67

<sup>20</sup> G.Jack, War Shrines, Burnley 1918, p.5

<sup>21</sup> LNWR Gazette, v.10, n.111, Nov. 1921, p.245. This monument is discussed further below, see pp.178-179, and illustrated in ill.21.

raising campaign 'are to be of the simplest character',<sup>22</sup>. Two years later, when it announced that the public was invited to lay flowers on the war shrine in Hyde Park, it added that 'the simpler the tribute the better',<sup>23</sup>. Mr Riddle, a Labour councillor in Carlisle, and secretary of the local Co-operative Society, told a public meeting called to discuss the city war memorial that, 'the finest feelings were expressed in the simplest terms',<sup>24</sup>, while Mr C.C. Frank of Leeds, who claimed to speak 'with no authority, only as a man in the street', believed that 'the less fussy and the more plain and simple and unified the design the better',<sup>25</sup>. Sir John Stirling Maxwell, at a meeting of Glasgow war memorial committee, argued that a monument 'of simple and austere form' would 'interpret the public feeling for those who had died better than anything elaborate',<sup>26</sup>. One of the proposals put forward by a councillor at Stoke Newington for the borough memorial specified that any monument, of whatever type, should be simple, while leaving its actual form vague. In this case, a simple monument was expected also to be cheap, and to allow a large proportion of the memorial fund to go to charity<sup>27</sup>.

The War Graves Commission used Blomfield's new cross widely in war cemeteries abroad, and in a large number of civilian cemeteries in this country where service personnel were buried. It could also have been seen in the illustrations of designs for the war cemeteries issued while they were under discussion in Parliament in 1919 and 1920. It thus

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<sup>22</sup> Evening News, 9 Oct. 1916

<sup>23</sup> Evening News, 3 Aug. 1918

<sup>24</sup> Carlisle Journal, 28 Mar. 1919

<sup>25</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 2 July 1920

<sup>26</sup> Strathclyde, G4.1, Glasgow War Memorial, min. 20 April 1921

<sup>27</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/1, min. 5/7/21



became a familiar object through the exposure given to it by the Commission, and its special association with the war dead was probably heightened by its physical proximity to their bodies in the war cemeteries. Memorial committees commissioned identical designs in a number of places (Blomfield maintained that he personally supervised the erection of about forty<sup>28</sup>) and its influence can be seen in some work by other artists. Walter Brierley offered the village of Bolton Percy a design which sounds very like it. 'The motif of the Cross', he wrote 'is a large base, on which the names will be legibly cut, and on which stands a bold and simple cross of sacrifice with a sword of defence on the face of it, with a shield on which the years of the war would be cut<sup>29</sup>. Blomfield commented later that 'the design is, of course, my copyright, but I have come across horrible travesties of it in many local memorials apparently executed by the local mason from illustrations of the cross given in the papers',<sup>30</sup>. The sword, which he applied to the face of the cross, became a common feature of memorial crosses which in other respects bear no resemblance to his design.

Simplifying, or otherwise adapting, a familiar form to give it contemporary resonance did not of itself guarantee that a design would become popular. The public exposure accorded by an influential organisation, such as the War graves Commission, was crucial. Lutyens produced a simplified variant of the cross (ill.19), very different from Blomfield's, but it was not widely taken up<sup>31</sup>. Lutyens' reputation as an artist was at least as great as

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<sup>28</sup> R.Blomfield, Memoirs of an Architect, London 1932, p.180

<sup>29</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 105, Bolton Percy war memorial, letter to the Bishop of Beverley 15 March 1919

<sup>30</sup> R.Blomfield, Memoirs, p.180

<sup>31</sup> There are examples at Dublin (illustrated) and York.

Blomfield's, and after the erection of the Cenotaph, in 1919, he was certainly more widely known. He was frequently employed by memorial committees, but rarely to produce a cross. One may doubt his commitment to his own design, given that he claimed to despise the cross as a symbol<sup>32</sup>, and he may have been reluctant to promote it. Certainly, it lacked the institutional backing, and consequent public exposure, which the War Graves Commission had given to Blomfield's design.

Of the other traditional forms of funerary monument, the obelisk and the inscribed wall-tablet were frequently used. In the case of the tablet, the form of the monument itself was not given any special connotation. It was the names inscribed on it which mattered. They carried the essential meaning of the memorial, and the treatment of them was the primary design consideration. Critics frequently recommended simplicity both in the wording and the cutting of inscriptions, although monumental masons and ecclesiastical architects like Walter Brierley offered designs in both gothic and classical styles as well.

As town monuments, the obelisk fitted into the prevailing fashion for classicism in urban design. The erection of an obelisk at Harrogate (ill.20) involved the creation of a new pattern of traffic circulation, cutting out a dangerous corner, and so formed part of a minor urban improvement scheme - a small step in the direction advocated by town-planners like Lionel Budden and Stanley Adshead<sup>33</sup>. In the countryside, it was traditionally a form of monument used to commemorate great landlords or statesmen on their estates. An example is the Somers monument, in the Malvern Hills near

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<sup>32</sup> Royal Institute of British Architects, Lutyens Family Papers, LuE/16/12/12, letter 30 Oct. 1918; see also M.Lutyens, Edwin Lutyens, London 1980, p.154

<sup>33</sup> Harrogate Corporation Minutes, Aug. 1921, p.4 and Sept. 1921 pp.2 and 5



Ledbury, commemorating the early eighteenth century politician of that name, but many others exist. It may be that the aristocratic connotations of the obelisk influenced Lord Derwent, Walter Brierley's patron, in his choice of one for the village memorial at Hackness<sup>34</sup>. Brierley responded saying that an obelisk would be 'suitable to your surroundings', and that it ought to be 'prominent against the skyline'<sup>35</sup>, as such aristocratic estate monuments had usually been. But obelisks had little association with the idea of a village community and are not often found as rural war memorials.

It is possible to see the obelisk, being a classical form, as proposing that the Great War was analogous to the legendary wars of Greece and Rome, but contemporaries do not seem to have found this meaning in it. On the contrary, they were more inclined to invest it with a Christian meaning, to judge by the variations worked on it by designers, for an obelisk was frequently combined with the cross. R. Wynn Owen, whose design for the LNWR memorial was just such a Christian obelisk (ill.21), explained that he had placed crosses at the apex of the monument 'as the crowning feature of the design' to suggest the Christian principles for which the dead had fought and died. The obelisk itself, he thought, connoted simplicity and served to focus attention on the essential, Christian meaning of the monument. Thoughts about the meaning of the monument,

lead us into sacred ground, and should therefore be approached in a spirit of humility, so the structure which is surmounted by the crosses and wreaths takes the form of a simple obelisk, entirely devoid of

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<sup>34</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 109, letter Derwent to Brierley 20 Mar 1919

<sup>35</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 105, letter 21 Mar 1919

ornament, to the end that the eye is led up to the crowning element of the design without distraction<sup>36</sup>.

The LNWR Gazette stressed another Christian meaning: the inseparability of believers on earth from those now in heaven. 'Marked by the cross on all sides, the memorial speaks to us of that sacred Christian unity, which is unbroken by death, untouched by the grave...'<sup>37</sup>. In a number of cases a cross was integrated more completely and subtly into the design of an obelisk. Yarmouth war memorial has a relief cross on each face, while retaining the distinct simplicity and unity of an obelisk (ill.22). The memorial at Lewisham (ill.23) also has a cross on each face, but present only as a course of stone blocks, just proud enough of the rest of the structure to cast a suggestive shadow in direct sunlight. The memorial outside Mill Hill Unitarian Chapel, Leeds, contains a similar device.

In 1916, the sculptor William Goscombe John had provided a far more elaborate development of the obelisk as a memorial to ships engineers killed by enemy action, erected at Liverpool Pierhead by a committee under the leadership of Lord Derby (ill.24). The monument has an elaborate and apparently pagan symbolic programme, representing on the base officers and men, above them figures of earth, air, fire and water supporting an 'ocean encircled globe' with a flaming sun rising behind it. At the top are female figures representing the sea, holding wreaths, and on the summit a torch 'suggestive of the triumph of fire and commemorative of the services rendered by those who keep the lights burning'<sup>38</sup>. A programme with this degree of complexity was

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<sup>36</sup> Public Record Office, RAIL 1057/2868, LNWR, Papers relating to the unveiling of War Memorial, Euston, 21 Oct. 1921, letter 6 Nov. 1921

<sup>37</sup> LNWR Gazette, v.10, n.111, Nov. 1921, p.245

<sup>38</sup> Builder, v.111, 14 July 1916, p.22



not often attempted in the more architectural types of monument, such as the cross or the obelisk. The most common conventions for them were set, on one hand, by the aesthetic of simplicity and, on the other, by straight-forward allusion to the Christian faith through the symbol of the cross in some form.

## 2. Convention and Participation

The conventions of commemorative art set recognisable standards for memorial work, and so allowed the public both to know what they might expect from artists, and to make judgements about what was provided for them. Memorial committees had to discuss designs both with their artists and with members of the public, all of whom must be convinced of the propriety and quality of what the artists produced. As Arthur Clutton-Brock advised potential clients, 'we shall not have good war memorials...unless we give time and pains to them ourselves'<sup>39</sup>. The capacity to discuss art in an informed manner was essential to the participatory character of war memorial projects, and existence of widely recognised aesthetic and symbolic conventions made this possible. Apart from mere visual familiarity, an important aspect of conventional monumental forms was that they had familiar ideas associated with them - meanings which could conveniently be described and discussed. By referring to these meanings, members of the public were able to work out their own preferences for a memorial type, or to be convinced that a particular type, or an innovation applied to it, was appropriate.

Artists and clients discussed the forms and imagery of monuments in a language which embodied a very literal-minded attitude to symbolic meaning. Artists approached symbolism

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<sup>39</sup> A.Clutton-Brock, On War Memorials, p.11

in a way which lent itself to verbalisation, creating programmes of meaning which could readily be explained to clients or described in the official programmes of unveiling ceremonies. This was as true of the purely formal elements of a design as of any images incorporated in it. We have seen R.Wynn Owen's explanation of his use of the obelisk as a humble, because simple, approach to the sacred mystery of the Christian values represented by the cross. In an equally literal manner, Charles Carus Wilson intended the flagstaff, which is the main feature of his design for Sheffield war memorial (ill.25) to express aspiration<sup>40</sup>, presumably by reaching upward. The finial on the mast is a 'celestial crown' providing the culmination of the symbolism, presumably that to which the dead had aspired<sup>41</sup>.

Memorial committee members took a similarly literal view of the meaning of the formal elements of designs. Wakefield memorial committee claimed that in its selection of a design (ill.26),

an effort has been made to obtain a memorial which, whilst simple and dignified in outline, suggests that firmness and strength symbolical of the undoubted spirit of those who fought and fell in their country's cause<sup>42</sup>.

The memorial is a rectilinear stone mass, slightly tapering upwards, suggesting the batter of a fortress wall, with carved wreaths in recesses in the upper stonework which

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<sup>40</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (16), undated & untitled press cutting. The newspaper report acknowledged that this was an 'unconventional design', but gave a precedent by describing it as a Venetian mast, on the model of those standing in front of the basilica in the Piazza San Marco.

<sup>41</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (17), letter from C.Carus-Wilson, 3 Mar. 1925

<sup>42</sup> Wakefield Library, press cuttings



could be read as a minimal castellation<sup>43</sup>. Whoever proposed to Stoke Newington council that the borough memorial should be 'a huge piece of rough granite, impressive in its rugged strength', with names on a polished section, must have been thinking in similar terms about the associations of the formal and material qualities of the monument. The tendency to interpret form literally made it relatively easy to find quite full meaning in monuments which contained little or no explicit allegory, and to convey a sense of their possible meanings to the public. By full, I mean that the meaning understood by a viewer should seem sufficient to account for the existence and form of the monument as a whole. Its form and imagery did not present obvious problems of interpretation by containing prominent inexplicable features.

Figure sculpture was a very familiar tradition of public art for major memorials. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the amount of it had been considerably extended by the movements to erect Victoria, Boer War and Edward VII memorials. Sculpture representing the contemporary soldier, or some aspect of military life, offered an engaging image to artistically inexperienced people, who nonetheless had become familiar with military life and its trappings, and who wanted to see something which appealed to their experience. A demobilised gunner speaking in the Royal Artillery's war memorial committee was keen that the memorial should be something to represent 'the views of every gunner, not only the officers, but those who come to London with their families etc.'. He wanted something which was recognisably connected with the Artillery, such as a team and gun, rather than a design by

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<sup>43</sup> This monument is also an obelisk with crosses attached.

Lutyens based on the Cenotaph, which he equated with the taste of the officers<sup>44</sup>.

Sculpture was particularly valued for offering an historical record of what contemporary soldiers had looked like.

Edward Warren had written in his Civic Arts Association pamphlet that figure sculpture was 'an endless opportunity for effective and historically valuable presentment',<sup>45</sup>.

W.G.Storr-Barber recommended one of his figurative designs to Llandrindod Wells memorial committee on the grounds that it would show future generations 'the British soldier as he was in the Great War',<sup>46</sup>. Carus Wilson intended the figures on the base of his design for Sheffield to be both decorative and an historical record<sup>47</sup>. The idea that a memorial should be a record appealed to many committee members. The requirement for accuracy laid sculptors open to informed criticism by people with no artistic credentials, and could make their work more troublesome. At the same time, it allowed committee members to be more closely involved in the development of a memorial design than they otherwise might, through the opportunity it gave to discuss technical details of a figure's appearance.

We shall see in the next chapter how much detailed criticism and advice the Royal Artillery committee gave to its sculptor. Other committees also had resident military experts who checked the accuracy of figurative work for them. At Llandrindod Wells a general who lived locally supplied equipment for B.Lloyd, the memorial's sculptor, to use as a model, and when the committee visited the studio,

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<sup>44</sup> Royal Artillery War Commemoration Fund, Minutes, Extraordinary General Meeting, 30 July 1920

<sup>45</sup> E.Warren, War Memorials, p.2

<sup>46</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, letter 14 Sept. 1920

<sup>47</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (16), press cutting



the general attended as well to give advice<sup>48</sup> (ill.27). The figure Henry Poole originally designed for Pudsey war memorial (ill.28) was criticised as being inaccurate. In the original proposal, the soldier was walking with his rifle slung over his shoulder and his bayonet fixed<sup>49</sup>. Some committee members took exception to this on the grounds that if he was 'marching easy', as he appeared to be, the bayonet would not have been fixed. Poole justified his design by referring to photographs taken in battle of men advancing against the enemy behind an artillery barrage in just this kind of attitude, with their bayonets fixed<sup>50</sup>. They might even be smoking cigarettes, he said. He thought this 'very typical of the modern methods of warfare', and hence true to actual experience. But the committee would not accept Poole's use of 'a special and occasional attitude for perpetuation...instead of a more familiar one'. It would 'create a wrong impression and misconception' in future viewers. 'Not one person in a thousand today, will be aware of the special method adopted in the latter part of the war...and none of the future generations will be aware of it or appreciate its meaning'<sup>51</sup>. It was also argued that the bayonet would attract lightning. In the end it was omitted<sup>52</sup>.

Artists valued accurate representation of the details of wartime life in monumental sculpture just as much as their

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<sup>48</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, letter from B.Lloyd 7 March 1921; letter to B.Lloyd 30 April 1921

<sup>49</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 50, letter from H.Poole, 22 Dec. 1922, enclosing drawing

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. letter from H.Poole, 11 May 1922

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. letter from W.Shackleton, 13 May 1922

<sup>52</sup> It is possible that the bayonet was disliked simply for being a bayonet, with all its violent connotations. Bayonets created a problem in nearby Bradford two months later. The issue of violence is discussed at various points in subsequent chapters.

clients did. Sculptors took trouble over accuracy of their own volition, not simply to satisfy clients. Gilbert Ledward and Charles Jagger both studied military equipment in the embryonic Imperial War Museum collection on their own initiative when they were working on sculptures for a proposed national war memorial building in 1919<sup>53</sup>. Henry Poole had himself chosen to design his figure for Pudsey on the authority of official photographs.

Accuracy of detail was not a new requirement in public monumental sculpture. Before the First World War, artists had sometimes drawn attention to the accuracy of their designs in order to recommend them to clients.

F.J.Williamson supported his 1909 submission for the South Shields Victoria memorial competition by pointing out that he could provide entirely correct details of the royal regalia 'for, by a most gracious order of Her late Majesty I was able to have the Orb and Sceptre removed from the Crown Jewels...and entrusted to me so that my model might be an exact copy'<sup>54</sup>. Fritz Roselieb's specification for his entry made the same point: 'in the full size model the features would be accurately copied from works executed from Her Majesty during her lifetime to which the sculptor has access. This also applies to the Robes, jewels and State Emblems'<sup>55</sup>.

The requirement that memorial sculpture should record the facts of modern warfare usually stopped short of representing the facts of death. Probably the most common

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<sup>53</sup> Imperial War Museum, Department of Art, 240/6, Jagger correspondence, letter 15 Jan. 1919. Jagger wanted to work from a real field gun, as he did not find photographs sent by the War Office adequate. Ibid. 251/6, Ledward correspondence, letters 27 Jan. 1919 and 3 Feb. 1919, show that Ledward and Jagger used the museum collection together.

<sup>54</sup> Tyne and Wear, T95/93, Box 2, letter from F.Williamson 1 March 1909

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. specification dated March 1909



figurative reference to death was the soldier with rifle reversed. This depicts not the dead but those who mourned them, first and foremost their former comrades, showing an awareness of death through an appropriately military gesture, but not its brute fact. Dead figures may sometimes be found, born by angelic or allegorical figures, or laid out in dignity upon a tomb - conventions familiar from earlier funerary art. Examples of the former are F.V.Blundstone's memorials for Stalybridge (ill.29) and for Prudential Insurance in London. The mediaeval pattern of royal and knightly tomb sculpture had remained in use for personal monuments into the twentieth century. It was reproduced in the tomb of General Sir Redvers Buller, a Boer War commander, in Winchester cathedral, and it was used by Thomas Clapperton for a private memorial to an individual killed in the Great War at the church of Saint John Lee, Hexham (ill.30). Lutyens applied this treatment of the dead body to a number of his cenotaph designs, lifting the body high above the viewer so that no individual portraiture could be expected, and the figure achieved an anonymity suitable to a collective memorial, a point stressed in the official booklet about Southampton cenotaph<sup>56</sup> (ill.31).

Charles Jagger added the figure of a corpse to his memorial for the Royal Artillery (ill.32) at a late stage in the development of the design. It is covered by a greatcoat which obscures the face, avoiding the necessity to give it a specific identity, and achieving the same effect of anonymity as Lutyens. At the same time, the figure is left in a kind of limbo, casually covered up, as if awaiting disposal, rather than formally laid out. A number of the Artillery committee members found fault with it. One criticism was that a figure of this sort was inappropriate in a memorial which should, first and foremost, console the bereaved; another simply that it was 'rather on the gruesome

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted in D.Boorman, At the Going Down of the Sun, p.121

side,<sup>57</sup>. A third, advanced by a number of members of the regiment, was that if there was to be 'a recumbent figure, it should be of a man just shot down',<sup>58</sup>, presumably because it would appear a more heroic and active image. A rare treatment of a body in this dramatic manner occurs in the Cameronian's memorial in Glasgow (ill.33). Gilbert Ledward had included two similar figures in preliminary studies for a bronze relief on the Guards memorial, but they were removed before the final version, possibly at the request of committee members who followed his work on the project closely<sup>59</sup> (ills.34-36). Jagger's figure, however, was also praised by a number of speakers in the Artillery committee because it clearly connected the memorial with the dead, even if they had reservations about its actual execution, and it was approved. Thus the crucial issue for most committee members seems to have been enhanced recognition of the reference to the dead, which confirmed the dedication of the monument.

### 3. Artistic Nationalism

The national origins of an artist, or of a style of work, sometimes became important issues in the commissioning of war memorials. A number of commentators condemned the use

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<sup>57</sup> Royal Artillery, Central Committee, 12 Nov. 1924, letter from Col. Lewin and comment by F. Mercer

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. comment by General Newton.

<sup>59</sup> Courtauld Institute, G. Ledward, typescript for 'The Autobiography of a Sculptor During the First Fifty Years of the Twentieth Century', p.43. I am grateful to Dr Benedict Read for showing me this document. Advice on the accuracy of the relief was provided by an artillery colonel. (Typescript 'History of the Guards Divisional Memorial', p.2, kindly supplied by Maj. H.W. Schofield.) Ledward's originally half-naked gunners have been tidied into proper battlefield kit for the finished panel. Ledward had himself been a gunner in Italy, but this, clearly, did not make him a sufficiently reliable authority.



of foreign artists, or the adoption of foreign styles. To some extent this was a legacy of the war, which had seen an increased stress on the virtues of British national character and culture, and a corresponding hostility to their German counterparts. Adherence to national cultural values was an aesthetic, moral and economic matter. To employ foreigners, especially former enemies could be seen both as importing foreign values to dilute those of the native culture, and as a failure to support the economic interests of Britain. The impact of such views was largely negative, encouraging artists and clients not to do certain things, and so confirming most British memorial art in its conservatism. This exclusion of foreign art can be seen as constituting a convention of artistic practice, affecting either the appearance of the works commissioned, or the process of their production.

Some artists, who were concerned that foreigners might get the best memorial commissions, insisted that British war memorials should be by Britons, and in a characteristically British style. In 1917, the council of the Royal Society of British Sculptors heard that Jacob Epstein, an American by birth, might be engaged to produce a memorial to the recently dead Lord Kitchener. The council proposed writing to the promoters of the memorial, arguing that 'in justice to British sculptors now serving at the front, no commission should be given for any national memorial till after peace is declared', and that any such memorial should be 'of the British school, and executed by a sculptor of purely British descent',<sup>60</sup>. The letter was not sent, only because Sir Thomas Brock, president of the society, thought the use of private influence would be more effective<sup>61</sup>. It is likely that the council's hostility to Epstein was at least partly

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<sup>60</sup> Royal Society of British Sculptors, Minutes of Council, 28 June 1917

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 16 Oct. 1917

motivated by dislike of modernist sculpture generally, for, at the same time, its members protested at a proposal to exempt Epstein from military service because he was an especially talented artist<sup>62</sup>. Sir George Frampton, a past president of the society, wrote to The Times to warn that foreigners 'may be given preference and allowed to suck the juice from the grape (which should be the birthright of our own flesh and blood) leaving but the dry husk to the men of our race, whose development we have watched with such pride and pleasure'<sup>63</sup>.

Hostility to foreign artists was only partly due to professional protectionism. The heightened nationalism which war had brought with it influenced the views of members of the public, and the call for works of purely British art accorded with a widespread mood. In 1925 a rumour spread in Barnsley that John Tweed's bronze figure for the town's memorial had been cast in Germany, and protests were made to the committee. It had in fact been cast by the Compagnie des Bronzes of Brussels, one of Europe's leading foundries. The Sheffield Mail commented: 'It is not pleasant to realise that a figure in memory of Britishers was made by alien hands', although it added that 'it is infinitely preferable that it should have been made by our allies than by our erstwhile enemies'<sup>64</sup>. The mayor of Barnsley added that he could not understand why foreigners were employed, he thought British workmanship was best.

German art aroused the greatest hostility. During the war, some critics and artists publicly condemned recent German art as typifying a ruthless and dangerous national ethos. In 1916, Stanley Adshead had lectured on 'the significance

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 28 June 1917

<sup>63</sup> Times, 28 July 1917

<sup>64</sup> Sheffield Mail, 18 Aug. 1925



of the war memorial in its relation to national and political outlook', and had concluded that the monuments of the Second Reich were 'strong, uncivilized interpretations of the power of the warlords'. He cited, in particular, the undoubtedly extraordinary memorial at Leipzig, designed by Bruno Schmitz and completed in 1913, to celebrate the centenary of the defeat of Napoleon in the Battle of the Nations<sup>65</sup> (ill.37). Also in 1916 Architectural Review published a series of articles on the war memorial art of the belligerent nations in the pre-war period. One of these maintained that, 'in the memorials of war of modern Germany we see exemplified in the most appalling manner that creed of ruthless domination which has left such a tale of human misery in the stricken lands over which the German army has trampled'<sup>66</sup>. Schmitz' Leipzig monument was condemned as 'a mammoth embodiment of the "frightfulness"' which the Prussian military theorist Bernhardi was supposed to have advocated<sup>67</sup>.

By implication, anything which seemed to follow the example of art in the German Empire must be inappropriate for commemorating Britain's part in the war. A particular object of criticism was the Siegesallee in Berlin (an avenue created to celebrate the Prussian defeat of France in 1870, containing monuments to the victors). In 1916, the Church Times insisted, 'We shall naturally avoid imitations of the Germania monuments and the atrocities of the Siegesallee, known among Germans themselves as the petrified slaughterhouse...'<sup>68</sup>. After Charles Pawley had exhibited his proposal for a national war memorial in the form of a major re-development in Westminster, at the end of 1918

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<sup>65</sup> Times, 27 Jan. 1916

<sup>66</sup> 'Memorials of War VIII: German', Architectural Review, v.40, 1916, p.109

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p.107

<sup>68</sup> Church Times, 3 Mar. 1916

(ill.38), the writer Lawrence Weaver criticised the scheme for showing a likeness to Prussian monumental planning. He said 'it would, if carried out, cover Westminster with a fine reminiscence of the "Siegesallee"',<sup>69</sup>. The London Society, which supported the efforts of classicist urban designers like Stanley Adshead to supply London with monumental architectural ensembles comparable to Paris, Berlin or Vienna, felt the force of this criticism. In 1919 the society's journal said that

London is beginning to realise at last her position in the Empire, and all sections of the people are determined to have their memorials. Here is an opportunity for some real planning which may not occur again for several generations to come,<sup>70</sup>.

The writer liked the idea that Portland Place might be extended into Regent's Park to form a site for monuments commemorating the war, but continued: 'We do not want a "Sieges Allée" in London',<sup>71</sup>.

#### 4. Inventing a Convention: the Cenotaph

The majority of monuments erected as war memorials belonged to well-worn types, in particular the cross, the naturalistic or allegorical statue, and the obelisk. One common type of monument was new, and seen to be new. It was derived from the Cenotaph erected in Whitehall for the Peace Day military parade held on 19 July 1919 to celebrate the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The Whitehall Cenotaph had two incarnations (ills.39-40). The first was a temporary structure of wood and plaster, marked to look as

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<sup>69</sup> Builder, v.116, 6 June 1919, p.563

<sup>70</sup> London Society Journal, n.21, July 1919, p.1

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.2



if it was made of stone blocks, carrying flags and wreaths, with the inscription 'The Glorious Dead' and the dates of the war. It provided an object for the parading soldiers to salute in honour of their comrades who had been killed.

Its site and position in the street was determined by its place in that day's ceremonies. It had to be in the route of the march, somewhere conspicuously visible to the crowds who attended, in reasonably impressive surroundings. It was informally unveiled the day before the parade, and people laid wreaths at it, most of which had to be removed again for the march past<sup>72</sup>. The choir of Westminster Abbey sang 'anthems and hymns' near it, striking, the Morning Post said, 'the note of solemnity'<sup>73</sup>. It was saluted not only by the marching soldiers but by the allied commanders, Foch and Haig amongst them. The American commander, General Pershing, pulled up his horse and turned to face the Cenotaph for a few seconds before riding on, and was cheered by the crowd as he left<sup>74</sup>. On subsequent days people came to lay more flowers at the monument's base.

Press accounts of the ceremony paid a great deal of attention to the Cenotaph. The Manchester Guardian gave a highly poetic account of it, saying that in its vicinity 'a light was shining in the daylight like a light on an altar'. It seemed at first 'a tiny object in the distance, but as the procession went on with all its separate associations of great deeds done and of those who had died in doing them, it loomed larger and larger in people's minds'<sup>75</sup>. The Morning Post was positively mystical. 'Near the memorial', it reported, 'there were moments of silence when the dead

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<sup>72</sup> Manchester Guardian, 21 July 1919

<sup>73</sup> Morning Post, 21 July 1919

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Manchester Guardian, 21 July 1919

seemed very near, when one almost heard the passage of countless wings. Were not the fallen gathering in their hosts to receive their comrades' salute and take their share in the triumph they had died to win?'<sup>76</sup>. In The Times's judgement, 'no feature of the Victory March in London made a deeper or worthier impression than the cenotaph...'<sup>77</sup>

Within days a movement was under way in Parliament and the press to have a permanent version of the Cenotaph produced. The Times of 21 July carried a letter from 'RIP', dated the day before the peace parade (i.e. the day the temporary monument was unveiled), arguing that it should be retained, with bronze rather than evergreen wreaths. Captain Ormsby-Gore asked a question in the House of Commons proposing a permanent, exact replica, on the same site, with the wreaths in bronze<sup>78</sup>. Two other MPs supported him, citing the approval which had been shown by the public. Twenty three MPs signed a memorandum to the First Commissioner of Works asking that it be re-erected on the same site<sup>79</sup>. The permanent stone version which now stands in Whitehall was unveiled by the King on Armistice Day 1920, as part of a day of ceremonies which included, immediately after the unveiling, the burial of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey.

In many respects the commissioning of the Cenotaph followed the procedure involved in commissioning a normal monument. The Prime Minister was determined that it should be a work of high artistic quality, and was keen that a reputable artist should be employed. He suggested that 'some

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<sup>76</sup> Morning Post, 21 July 1919

<sup>77</sup> Times, 26 July 1919

<sup>78</sup> Evening News, 21 July 1919; Parliamentary Debates, fifth series, v.118, p.1366 23 July 1919

<sup>79</sup> Public Record Office, WORK 20/139, undated memorandum



prominent artist should be consulted on the subject',<sup>80</sup>, and again later, 'one or two well known architects',<sup>81</sup>. A brief was set for the design: Curzon specified a simple pylon, and Lloyd George wanted it 'sufficiently high to be impressive',<sup>82</sup>. The Cabinet was so specific about the form the monument should take, however, not essentially for aesthetic reasons, but because it was keeping tight control of all the arrangements for the Peace Day parade. Arrangements for a salute to the dead were regarded as sensitive. Cabinet members were not prepared to leave such an important symbol entirely to the discretion of an artist, however eminent. Not all of the Cabinet had thought the project a good idea, and Curzon was afraid that it might be desecrated<sup>83</sup>.

Subsequently, the Cabinet was concerned to preserve the consensus which developed around the Cenotaph at its first appearance, and prevented almost any noticeable changes being made to the design when it was reproduced in stone. It would admit none of the additions which were proposed to express some sort of religious sentiment, either Christian or more ecumenical<sup>84</sup>. It would not even allow Lutyens to replace the real silk flags with carved and painted stone ones, something he very much wanted to do<sup>85</sup>.

A cenotaph was one option frequently considered and sometimes chosen by local committees as their war memorials.

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<sup>80</sup> Public Record Office, CAB 23.11, p.2, min. 1 July 1919

<sup>81</sup> Public Record Office, CAB 23.11, p.7, min. 4 July 1919

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Public Record Office, CAB 23.12, p.43, memorandum 23 Oct. 1919

<sup>85</sup> Public Record Office, CAB 24.109, memorandum 5 July 1920

Comparison with the Whitehall example usually formed part of the discussion where this occurred. Some people wanted their cenotaphs to be direct imitations of the one in Whitehall. At Stoke-on-Trent an 'exact replica' was unveiled in November 1920. (Its inscription differed from the one on the original in referring to 'our', not 'the' glorious dead, if the press account is correct.) It was made of timber, expanded metal and a 2" coating of cement<sup>86</sup>. The Lord Provost of Glasgow suggested a reproduction of the Whitehall Cenotaph as the memorial for his city in 1921<sup>87</sup>. More often, while approving the general idea of a cenotaph, local committees wanted it adapted to be a recognisably individual monument. Sir John Stirling Maxwell thought that merely to replicate the object in Whitehall was 'scarcely worthy of a great city like Glasgow'<sup>88</sup>. However a monument related to the cenotaph (and 'of artistic design', the committee said) had already received the support of the majority, including Stirling Maxwell himself<sup>89</sup>. A member of the Royal Artillery's committee said that the Cenotaph was 'the style which appeals to me', although he did not want a mere replica either<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Staffordshire Sentinel, 10 Nov. 1920; the original is no longer visible, but a contemporary photograph shows it to have been very close to its model, Hanley Library, S.I.850 A (6)

<sup>87</sup> Strathclyde, G 1/3/1, letter from Sir J. Stirling Maxwell, 4 Feb. 1921

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Strathclyde, G4.1, Glasgow War Memorial, mins. 13 Feb. 1920 and 18 Sept. 1919

<sup>90</sup> Royal Artillery, Extraordinary General Meeting, 30 July 1920, Sir F.Hall. The committee obtained a design from Lutyens, with sculpture by F. Derwent Wood (who had carved the permanent Cenotaph's details), before commissioning Charles Jagger. Lutyen's design is reproduced on the cover of Report of the R.A. War Commemoration Fund and The Royal Artillery Association for 1920.



Public enthusiasm required artists to incorporate the general form of the cenotaph into the repertoire of monumental types which they could offer to their clients. Artists who used it included practitioners of Lutyens's own standing in the architectural profession. Sir John Burnet provided a design incorporating a version of the cenotaph for Glasgow (ill.41). Sir Robert Lorimer provided a version of it with an Egyptian character for the Cumberland and Westmorland joint counties' memorial at Carlisle (ill.42). In normal circumstances, such people would probably have been reluctant to borrow from a design so closely associated with a professional rival. Their willingness to use it is a measure of how far it had become common property.

Even Reginald Blomfield, who had a number of professional conflicts with Lutyens, offered the city of Leeds a design whose classical detail, vertical emphasis, rectangular plan and sarcophagus suggest a large debt to Lutyens's idea<sup>91</sup> (ill.43). It had an elaborate upper stage, with the sarcophagus set under a roof carried on doric columns, and a sculptural group, apparently a female figure with children, on the top. Yet it had more in common with Lutyens' work than appears at first sight. Lutyens himself had proposed, and later executed, cenotaphs with a variety of sculptural additions, including recumbent figures on the top. The similarity was noticed by a Leeds alderman, who saw Blomfield's design as 'like the Cenotaph in London' in spite of the many differences of detail<sup>92</sup>. Use of the cenotaph form was not confined to architects. Two of the sculptors who offered designs for Llandrindod Wells war memorial included cenotaphs amongst their submissions, although their own specialisms were in figure carving and modelling<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> Yorkshire Evening Post, 19 June 1920

<sup>92</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 2 July 1920

<sup>93</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, letters from F.W.Doyle-Jones, 14 Sept. 1920 and B.Lloyd, 15 Sept. 1920

From being a characteristic and personal work by Lutyens (which he continued to develop himself for a number of clients), the Cenotaph had rapidly become a convention in its own right.

As a type, the cenotaph was invested with its own particular meaning. It especially connoted death and mourning.

Benjamin Lloyd supported his proposal for a cenotaph as Llandrindod Wells memorial by saying that it 'depicts the anguish of the nations engaged in the great war', and called it a 'more solemn form',<sup>94</sup>. Sir Alfred Mond understood the Cenotaph to be predominantly associated with bereavement when listing arguments for and against making it permanent. It might, he said, 'be of too mournful a character as a permanent expression of the triumphant victory of our arms',<sup>95</sup>. Burnet, too, saw it as largely connoting mourning. He told Glasgow war memorial committee that, although they had asked for a cenotaph, he believed the monument should express 'not only grief...but the spirit of sacrifice and achievement',<sup>96</sup>. The Lord Provost received a letter from a Glasgow citizen which made the same point indirectly. The writer would have preferred 'a record in imagery of service and victory' to 'a tombstone',<sup>97</sup>.

Many people thought the Cenotaph was a good design and appropriately expressive. When J.W.Simpson, President of the RIBA, presented Lutyens with the Institute's gold medal in 1921, he said,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. B.Lloyd 15 Sept. 1920

<sup>95</sup> Public Record Office, CAB 24.84, GT 7784, 23 July 1919

<sup>96</sup> Strathclyde, G4.1, Glasgow War Memorial, min. 8 June 1921

<sup>97</sup> Strathclyde, G 1/3/1, letter from G.Marton 15 May 1921



To me, as an architect, the Cenotaph is the most remarkable of his conceptions. Precisely suited to its site and its surroundings, austere yet gracious, technically perfect, it is the very expression of repressed emotion, of massive simplicity of purpose, of the qualities which mark those whom it commemorates and those who raised it<sup>98</sup>.

Its apparent simplicity predisposed people to think well of it. The Morning Post described the original as 'of an austere simplicity that is profoundly impressive'<sup>99</sup>. The Glasgow Herald believed a cenotaph would 'adequately, because simply' satisfy the demand for a monument in Glasgow<sup>100</sup>, and Sir F.Hall of the Royal Artillery liked it because 'it is so simple'<sup>101</sup>. The Staffordshire Advertiser praised the reproduction cenotaph at Stoke as 'strikingly beautiful in its simplicity of design'<sup>102</sup>.

There were qualities in the original which made it a suitable model for other monuments. Although it was clearly different from familiar types of monument, its actual form was not easy to grasp or describe. It was very plain in its details, as Lord Curzon, in his recommendation to the Cabinet, had said it should be. At the same time, he thought such an object 'might be made sufficiently impressive'<sup>103</sup>. Lutyens gave him what he asked for: an apparently simple object with a subtle composition intended to enhance its visual impact. (To judge from Lutyens'

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<sup>98</sup> Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, series 3, v.28, 25 June 1921, p.474

<sup>99</sup> Morning Post, 21 July 1919

<sup>100</sup> Glasgow Herald, 14 Feb. 1920

<sup>101</sup> Royal Artillery, min. 30 July 1920

<sup>102</sup> Staffordshire Advertiser, 19 Nov. 1920

<sup>103</sup> Public Record Office, CAB 23.11, p.7, min. 4 July 1919

sketches of the monument, which exaggerate the vertical perspective, he envisaged the slight stepping back of the upper part of the structure as a way of increasing the sense of recession, and so of height. Slight curves in the horizontal and vertical surfaces were introduced in the stone replica<sup>104</sup>.) Apart from its verticality, and the presence of wreaths and flags, there was little about its shape or decoration which was likely to impress itself immediately and unmistakably on viewers, especially if they had to judge from the photographs of it published in newspapers.

Press descriptions of the temporary Cenotaph may have led to some confusion about its appearance. The day before the peace parade The Times carried a misleading account of it, describing it as a pylon, and giving dimensions, but continuing, 'groups of flags will be arranged on each of the four sides... On the side fronting the pavement will be hung laurel wreaths... It is proposed to place at the top of the column' (the pylon was now described as a column) 'an altar containing a brazier from which will rise a tall flame'<sup>105</sup>. (Curzon had tentatively asked Lutyens for a flame, but they later abandoned the idea.) The Times gave no source for its information, but it might have come from someone who had seen an earlier proposal from the office of works which the Cabinet rejected. Alfred Mond had shown some unattributed drawings to the Cabinet at a meeting on 4 July, when Lloyd George in particular had expressed his keenness that a leading artist should be given the job<sup>106</sup>. The Morning Post interpreted the monument as a pedestal

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<sup>104</sup> Allan Greenberg discusses the formal qualities of the Cenotaph at length in A.Greenberg, 'Lutyens' Cenotaph', Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, v.48, 23 Mar. 1989, pp.5-23

<sup>105</sup> Times, 18 July 1919

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.



without its statue<sup>107</sup>. The Times continued to see its top as an altar<sup>108</sup>. It was, in fact, both a sarcophagus - a motif taken from classical architecture - and a coffin lying in state, draped in the Union Jack, according to the ceremonial practice for burying dead soldiers.

The Times description may have misled readers. At Stockport, a shrine to the dead of a local firm, S.R.Carrington and Sons, was erected for the peace day celebrations, consisting of a squat obelisk on a tall base, with flags on each side, a wreath on the face, and various pictures and inscriptions. Afterwards, the Stockport Advertiser called this a 'cenotaph', and described it as 'similar in nature to the one which was erected in London'<sup>109</sup>. In October 1919 a temporary structure was provided in Enfield market place to accompany a memorial service, and the public was invited to lay flowers at it. The Enfield Gazette had announced that this structure would be a replica of the Cenotaph, but it was in fact a squat obelisk with a flat top<sup>110</sup>.

Alternatively, people may have been prepared to see a wide range of not very similar objects as being like the Cenotaph, especially if they were geometrical, fairly simple, and, above all, fulfilled the same shrine-like function. Its identification as a shrine was another quality which made the Cenotaph particularly suitable for widespread but imprecise imitation. People saw it from the very first as a shrine on the model by now familiar from the street shrines movement, culminating in the shrine erected in Hyde Park in August 1918. Lord Curzon had referred to

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<sup>107</sup> Morning Post, 21 July 1919

<sup>108</sup> Times, 19 July 1919

<sup>109</sup> Stockport Advertiser, 25 July 1919

<sup>110</sup> Enfield Gazette, 10 Oct. 1919 and 17 Oct. 1919

the Cenotaph in a Cabinet meeting as 'a temporary shrine',<sup>111</sup>, and members of the public showed that they saw it in the same way by placing flowers at it both before and after the military parade on 19 July 1919.

The events at the Cenotaph that day had given it a greater claim to public esteem than other shrines. The salute of the peace parade and the allied commanders had made it especially sacred. It stood out amongst the ceremonial decorations as something closely associated with the dead, and that association attracted immediate popular interest. The sanctity it acquired on that occasion remained an important part of many people's attitude to it, reflected in public support for the idea that it should remain in its original position, and not be removed to a quieter or safer site. As Alfred Mond said, 'no other site would have the same historical or sentimental association',<sup>112</sup>. It was soon recognised as a national rather than simply a local shrine, and it was used by newspapers to provide a vivid focus for their accounts of the first Armistice anniversary commemoration on 11 November 1919. The Morning Post wrote, 'as with a single impulse, all thoughts converged on the National Cenotaph in Whitehall',<sup>113</sup>. Other papers published highly coloured and emotional accounts of the behaviour of people around it.

However original it was in form, the Cenotaph fitted the existing convention established by shrines. People had been paying homage to war shrines for the previous three years and they knew what to do with them. Thus there was no hesitation in the public response to the Cenotaph. It was immediately surrounded by floral tributes. The idea of making permanent versions of shrines which had proved

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<sup>111</sup> Public Record Office, CAB 23.11, p.7, min. 4 July 1919

<sup>112</sup> Public Record Office, CAB 24.84, GT7784, 23 July 1919

<sup>113</sup> Morning Post, 12 Nov. 1919



popular was already current, and a plan by Lutyens for a replacement for the one in Hyde Park had appeared and been discussed in the press. The familiarity of shrines must have done a great deal to encourage this immediate, active response to the Cenotaph, and so to assist the adoption of such a unique and idiosyncratic work of art as a model for so many other memorials<sup>114</sup>.

A memorial committee's request for a cenotaph was, therefore, usually no more than a request for something conforming to a vaguely defined type. Designers could treat the request with considerable flexibility. Some produced fairly close imitations, like that for Edmonton in north London (ill.44), others produced assemblages of explicitly classical features, mimicking tombs, as at Enfield (ill.45). Some used the cenotaph as a basis for sculptural elaboration. There are a number of war memorials, like those at Pudsey and Barnsley (ills.28 and 46), whose most eye-catching feature is a figurative sculpture, but this is placed on a stone base so large as to be out of all proportion to it. Although the Cenotaph was not mentioned in the commissioning and design of either of these, it seems likely that they were conceived to some extent on the model of a cenotaph enhanced with sculpture, and should be understood as owing their overall form to that model.

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<sup>114</sup> Greenberg has argued that the Cenotaph owed its popularity to its formal qualities and to the 'metaphor for the vulnerability of the individual in a democratic society' which he sees in it. He does not examine the context of aesthetic ideas, nor the existing commemorative practices, which I am certain underlay any formal appeal the monument may have had. I disagree with his belief that the Cenotaph was exceptional in that it 'became the focus of four years of pent-up sorrow which had been waiting...to be released'. On the contrary, it continued a form of response to war deaths, expressing sorrow combined with other ideas and feelings, which was well established by the end of the war. (A.Greenberg, 'Lutyens' Cenotaph', p.11)

## 5. Convention and Interpretation

The conventions of commemorative art were not established simply by reference to tradition, although the widespread reliance on traditional monumental forms might suggest this. Even where traditional forms were used, they acquired associations specific to the war, which we can see emerging in people's responses to them. These associations appeared in speech or writing, expressed as ideas such as 'sacrifice', or in gestures like the laying of floral tributes or the raising of hats. It was not tradition itself which provided the basis for commemorative conventions, but rather the interpretations which could be given to traditional forms in the light of wartime experience and the ideas to which that experience had given rise.

As we have seen, the cross acquired its particular relevance to the war dead through the largely propagandist transformation of Christ's redemptive sacrifice to apply to soldiers. The abstract formal qualities of monuments were also understood as representing moral qualities stereotypically attributed to soldiers. Works of literature could have the same effect as more ephemeral propagandist utterances in familiarising people with an idea about the war or the dead which then prompted their understanding of a symbol. A member of Sheffield war memorial committee referred to John McCrae's famous poem 'In Flanders Fields', published in December 1915, to justify his suggestion for a design change in the city memorial. He did not like the 'celestial crown' proposed as the finial of the flag staff because it was, he said, 'top heavy'. In its place, he suggested a torch, whose symbolic meaning he took from McCrae's verse which reads:

Take up our quarrel with the foe  
To you from failing hands we throw



The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

The torch, he argued 'has definite significance in these memorial matters',<sup>115</sup>. The upturned torch - a light extinguished - was indeed a classical funerary symbol. Here the torch acquired a quite different meaning through the familiarity of the wartime poem: continuity in a collective struggle, carrying on the values of those who had died. The second and third lines, with the image of passing the torch, are also quoted in the inscription on Chingford war memorial.

To make public participation in the commissioning of commemorative art effective, it was essential that the language of interpretation and the standards of aesthetic judgement employed should be recognisable and communicable to people without specialist experience of the arts. The result was an interweaving of ideas and images which referred both to the war and to religious and funerary traditions, drawing on propaganda, imaginative literature, scripture and the arts, to form symbolic conventions peculiar to the commemoration of the war. People discussed their preferences for memorials and evaluated designs in terms taken from all these sources.

No single artistic convention satisfied everyone's requirements for a war memorial. None went entirely uncriticised or unopposed. As we shall see in the next chapter, some artists and antiquarians did not share a liking for simplified, unornamented monumental forms, or for simple lettering and the economical wording of inscriptions. A critic in the Builder thought the Cross of Sacrifice

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<sup>115</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (17), letter from W.Mackenzie-Smith, 19 Feb. 1925

looked insecure<sup>116</sup>. The widest currency any convention could acquire was to be promoted by some influential experts or institutions, and to meet the requirements of substantial sections of the public. Differences of opinion about the propriety of various conventions will be discussed further in the following chapter, along with the part played by artists, critics and connoisseurs in sustaining the conventions they approved of.

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<sup>116</sup> Builder, v.116, 11 Apr. 1919, p.394



## Chapter 6

## The War Memorial Business

A war memorial committee which chose to erect a monument had also to decide who should produce it. In towns, where commissioning civic monuments was an established practice, and the memorial fund would usually run to several thousand pounds, an architect or sculptor was usually employed to produce an original design. But a committee did not have to employ an artist, and where money was short it might think twice before doing so. An alternative was offered by the range of monuments, shrines, tablets and so on, which could be obtained off the shelf from church furniture firms and monumental masons. Artists were aware of this competition and attempted to persuade potential clients that they could more effectively offer what was needed for a memorial: a distinctive object of assured artistic quality and propriety within the budget available.

This chapter argues that the professionalism of artists, both in the techniques of their arts and in business affairs, was an important asset to clients, and that their professional institutions and rules offered a system by which the interests of clients could be guaranteed. At the same time, their organisation, training and prestige gave artists considerable power in their dealings with clients. In general, they retained control of their working process without compromising their aesthetic standards to satisfy clients' prejudices. Artists determined the treatment and quality of war memorials very largely themselves.

### 1. Business Opportunities

Artists recognised the professional benefits to be reaped from the large demand for memorials, and attempted to make the most of them through professional organisation and propaganda. Discussing the matter at the 1917 Annual

Meeting of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), one speaker said,

we must prepare for the time after the war, making our War Memorial [presumably he meant a general national commemorative effort] the helping of the position and interests of our profession, both for the present and the future, and doing all we can for the young men who are spared to us and who retain sufficient enthusiasm for the profession to return to it<sup>1</sup>.

There were reputations to be made as well. General Du Cane reported to the Royal Artillery's war memorial committee that Charles Jagger saw the commission for the regiment's memorial 'as an opportunity to make his name and he wishes to put in his best work'<sup>2</sup>. Professor Beresford-Pite, of the Royal College of Art, believed the reputation of the architectural profession as a whole was at stake.

The world judges us, employs us and uses us as it thinks best; and its wisdom in that matter is arrived at by our own efforts, our own promises and performances. ...in memorial art the world will look to us for inspiration and guidance.

If this was not forthcoming, he implied, 'the world may cease to look upon us as a great profession'<sup>3</sup>.

Architects were best equipped to exploit the opportunities offered by the market for memorials, and they appear to have received the bulk of war memorial business, whether the

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, series 3, v.25, Nov. 1917, p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Artillery, Executive Committee, min. 28 Feb. 1921

<sup>3</sup> Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, series 3, v.25, Nov. 1917, p.7



commissions were small or large. Sculptors were a less coherently organised group. There was a large body of masons who worked to the designs of architects, and who executed much of the smaller scale decorative work on memorials. Walter Brierley, who was a prominent architect in York, and County Architect to the North Riding, regularly used the same firm of Yorkshire masons for his commissions. Sculptors with independent practices and reputations gained through public exhibitions saw themselves as a group apart from these provincial firms. Occasionally architects would invite well-known sculptors to work on their commissions, as Brierley invited first F. Derwent Wood, then Henry Poole to co-operate with him at Pudsey. However, much of the time independent sculptors found themselves in competition with architects, to, they felt, their disadvantage. The Royal Society of British Sculptors (RBS) reported that it,

...cannot but recognise the very strong influence of the architect amongst all public bodies, owing no doubt to the fact that the maintenance of townships necessitates an architect being appointed a permanent official of all municipal bodies. It is only natural that in cases of memorials the committees should turn to their architect for preliminary advice, and his thoughts would obviously lay [sic] in the medium to which he is accustomed. Your council have made, and continue to make strenuous efforts to counteract these influences...<sup>4</sup>.

The RBS also saw a conflict between those it represented and the firms of masons who served architects. It blamed architects for undermining the interests of sculptors and, by implication, of fine art itself, by not employing sculptors of an equal professional standing to themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> Royal Society of British Sculptors, Annual Report of Council and Accounts, 1921, p.9

Architects, it noted, 'desiring to enrich their buildings with sculptural ornament [were] employing trade sculptors instead of members of the sculpture profession'<sup>5</sup>. The council of the society wrote to the RIBA to ask that 'first-rate sculptors' be consulted for sculptural work, rather than 'trade sculptors who at best must employ or contract with practical sculptors of possibly second or third rate abilities'<sup>6</sup>.

In spite of these differences, architects and sculptors adopted, so far as they could, the same approaches when dealing with clients. They promoted their services by offering aesthetic advice, defended their professional monopolies through disciplined solidarity, and were strict about the legal and commercial aspects of their business dealings. It makes sense, therefore, to treat artists as a homogeneous group in relation to members of the public who commissioned their work. A number of other groups - museum curators, critics, patrons of art, educationalists - were aware of the professional concerns and practices of artists, and used a similar language to express aesthetic ideas. Through the press and voluntary bodies interested in art, they assisted artists in upholding professional standards in the production of memorials.

## 2. Professional Advice to Clients

Artists, critics and pressure groups concerned with the arts strongly encouraged memorial committees to seek professional advice when commissioning a design, no matter how modest. They set up advisory bodies to give it, and to help committees conduct their commissions. The most respected sources of advice were well-known members of the artistic

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.8

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



professions, and their colleagues in museums, or in newspaper and magazine criticism. Artists' professional organisations such as the RIBA, RBS, and the Royal Academy of Art, as well as bodies concerned with improving and beautifying towns, or preserving ancient buildings, offered access to experts of this sort. They formed special committees to provide the information and professional contacts which memorial committees required.

The advice from all sources insisted on the necessity of consulting a properly trained artist. In an interview with The Times in 1915, Sir Thomas Brock, sculptor of the Victoria memorial at Buckingham Palace and president of the RBS, suggested that discerning memorial committees 'might . . . insist upon the artist's advice and direction'<sup>7</sup>. A circular from the Royal Academy of Art stated 'Designs should be obtained either by calling in a competent artist, or by competition . . . '<sup>8</sup>. Artists, it was implied, could guarantee propriety and quality in memorials through their expert knowledge of the traditions of monumental art. They knew which types of memorial were deemed suitable to different kinds of communities, and they would take the particular context of a commission into consideration. The architect Edward Warren wrote in a Civic Arts Association pamphlet that small communities should confine themselves to the simplest memorials, such as a cross or simple building. Figurative sculpture he thought more suitable for larger communities<sup>9</sup>. The cross was particularly recommended for villages. W.H.Wood, an architect in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, was pleased when the village of Dunholme chose his design

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, series 3, v.23, Jan. 1916, p.84.

<sup>8</sup> Royal Academy, Annual Report, 1918, p.65.

<sup>9</sup> E.Warren, War Memorials, London 1919, p.3

for a cross as its memorial because, he said, 'I feel it is the correct form for such a memorial to take',<sup>10</sup>.

Professional artists also had the skills necessary to apply these types in a way which was suited to the surroundings in which they would appear, and promised treatments of each commission which were both appropriate and distinctive. The RBS recommended that a qualified artist should be employed on every project to meet 'the wishes of all those who rightly think that these memorials should have an individual character suitable to the particular conditions and surroundings',<sup>11</sup>. Walter Brierley pointed out to one client for a village cross that he had given his design 'a strong Yorkshire character' to 'harmonize well with the quaint and irregular character of the village',<sup>12</sup>.

In his Times interview, Thomas Brock had said that memorial committees 'ought to fortify themselves by reference to the best examples of monumental art',<sup>13</sup>. Press discussions of art provided an obvious way of doing this, and a number of books were published specifically to offer historical examples of work suitable for war memorials, amongst them: Lawrence Weaver's Memorials and Monuments of 1915, W.H.Godfrey and H.Batsford's English Mural Monuments and Tombstones of 1916, and A.Valance's Old English Crosses and Lychgates of 1920.

Artists and critics advised clients to adopt the aesthetic outlook of professionals. They wrote a good deal on the

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<sup>10</sup> Tyne and Wear, TWAS 52/80, W.H.Wood letter book, letter to Mr Wilde, 5 Aug. 1919

<sup>11</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234

<sup>12</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 105, Whixley war memorial, letter to A.Taylor, 24 July 1919

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, series 3, v.23, Jan 1916 p.84.



subject in order to introduce clients to professional terms and standards of judgement. Arthur Clutton-Brock implied in a pamphlet for the Civic Arts Association, that clients could only get good art if they adopted the standards artists themselves used in judging each others' work. Poor public art was not the artists' fault, he argued. They could only produce good work if the public knew what it wanted. He then outlined a way of thinking about design which he hoped would help people make informed choices, using the analogy of the motor car's fitness for its purpose. An inscription, he said, 'should be good as an inscription, just as a motor car should be good as a car'. A good inscription 'says what is meant simply and finely', and 'the lettering is also simple, fine, clear and permanent....good lettering performs its function well, like a good motor car',<sup>14</sup>.

This apparently common sense argument was in fact the central idea of a design tradition derived ultimately from Ruskin and William Morris which maintained that beauty in design was the result of the fitness of an object for its intended purpose. However, by the early twentieth century the idea of fitness for purpose had been adopted by artists of quite different persuasions from Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. For example, it was used by Thomas Mawson, an eclectic designer who was at least as happy producing grand neo-classical civic schemes as the cottage architecture generally associated with the inheritance of Morris. In his plan for urban renewal in Bolton, commissioned by W.H.Lever and published in 1916, he took the example of a sailing boat to show the dependence of beauty on functional considerations. '...beauty which is not complementary to utility', he wrote, 'is no true beauty at

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<sup>14</sup> A.Clutton-Brock, On War Memorials, pp.9-10

all',<sup>15</sup>. What Clutton-Brock had proposed was, in fact, a standard of judgement already adopted by many artists and architects; and he hoped untutored clients would now make use of it too.

Older traditions also had their defenders. Aymer Valance, the author of Old Crosses and Lychgates, intended to offer 'the most appropriate forms of monument for reproduction or adaptation to the needs of the present'. He wrote: 'Too many of the manifestations of modern so-called art betray its utter bankruptcy, because having broken with tradition, it has no resource left but to express itself in wayward eccentricity and sensationalism, the very antitheses of the dignified beauty which the following of time-hallowed precedent alone can impart',<sup>16</sup>. In 1916 P.A. Robson reviewed two of the Civic Arts Association's pamphlets on memorials and inscriptions. He objected to the 'vulgar criticism which carps at Gothic', in particular for its illegibility. (Contemporary English lettering was frequently appreciated by exhibition reviewers for its simplicity and legibility. Eric Gill's work was regarded as a particularly fine example.) Durer's Geometriae, Robson pointed out, provided excellent and perfectly legible gothic lettering. 'There is room for all good styles in their proper place', he wrote. Legibility was only important where many people will be interested in the memorial. 'The fetish of legibility' should not be imposed on small memorials. 'Is there not a certain sense of delicacy which would guide us into designing such a memorial with some reticence, even obscurity, without losing any sense of art.' He believed that smaller memorials in churches should be in 'some

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<sup>15</sup> T.H. Mawson, Bolton As It Is And As It Might Be, Bolton and London 1916, p.13

<sup>16</sup> Old Crosses and Lych Gates, London, 1920, p.vii.



variant of gothic' and in Latin 'for the sake of terseness',<sup>17</sup>.

The different approaches proposed in this advice each had their origin in the working practices and business needs of artists. They were not formed by the artists in response to demands from clients for memorials, but were derived from the traditions and past practices of the various arts. The market for memorials gave artists and critics the opportunity to offer these artistic options to clients as products or services which they might buy. This was, in effect, a way in which artists could advertise the skills and services they offered. By promoting the idea that their particular style or branch of art was the most suitable for war memorials, artists could encourage business for their own practices. Professional commentators in the press could encourage business for the kinds of practice they preferred.

To a large extent memorial committees adopted the attitudes artists and critics hoped they would, although some artists held exaggerated expectations of the impact they could have on public taste through their work on memorials, and were disappointed. The RBS hoped that enquiries from the public would allow it 'to diffuse broadcast a greater knowledge of the true intent and purposes of sculpture, and a higher appreciation of the value and importance of taste in selection',<sup>18</sup>. It found, however, that usually, 'the insufficiency of funds, and the reluctance of local committees to surrender their personal judgement...has proved a bar to progress',<sup>19</sup>. On the other hand, the actual conduct of memorial committees suggests that, although they

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<sup>17</sup> Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, series 3, v.23, July 1916, p.288.

<sup>18</sup> Royal Society of British Sculptors, Annual Report of Council and Accounts, 1920, p.7

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Annual Report, 1921, p.6

may have been recalcitrant in some ways, and insisted on taking what they believed to be a responsible interest in their commissions, a great many of them valued the professional services of artists and deferred to their expertise in their specialist fields. The give-and-take required in dealing with memorial committees was perhaps more familiar and acceptable to provincial artists, especially architects used to the commercial aspects of the building world, than it was to the metropolitan sculptors gathered in the RBS.

Many artists were consulted even before a decision on a design was taken. The sculptor John Tweed was invited by Barnsley war memorial committee to visit the town, inspect the possible sites and make a report. He was soon appointed as sculptor to the memorial, but this consultative visit was a separate arrangement for which he was paid a consultancy fee<sup>20</sup>. Walter Brierley received many letters asking for advice on designs or for the loan of drawings to help local committees in their discussions. He made no charge for such services. The artist Muirhead Bone was invited to join the memorial committee for Steep, Hampshire, and accompanied several of its members to an exhibition of war memorial designs held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1919<sup>21</sup>. The committee at Hoylake and West Kirby wrote for advice to the Royal Academy and was given an appointment with Sir George Frampton, 'than whom no more competent authority could be found', in the words of the Hoylake and West Kirby Advertiser<sup>22</sup>. Frampton recommended Charles Jagger 'without

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<sup>20</sup> Barnsley, Town Clerk's In Letters, File 35, 21 Jan. 1921

<sup>21</sup> Hampshire, 31 M 71/Z1, mins. 7 July 1919 and 17 Oct. 1919

<sup>22</sup> Wirral, ZWO/16, cutting, 7 May 1920



hesitation'<sup>23</sup>. By 1922 the Civic Arts Association claimed to have 'given free advice in hundreds of cases'<sup>24</sup>.

Where committee members had social connections with artists or other informed people, they sometimes pursued the same kind of search for reputable practitioners informally through these contacts. The Great Western Railway appears to have canvassed various people's opinions on the appointment of a sculptor before deciding on Charles Jagger. Lord Churchill, the company chairman, said in his report to the 1921 Annual Meeting that, although no decision had yet been made, the Board was 'taking very expert advice' on the appointment<sup>25</sup>. A memorandum from the company secretary to the chairman of the war memorial committee proposed Frampton, Mackennal and Pomeroy as possible sculptors, all prestigious names<sup>26</sup>. A further note lists Goscombe John, Thorneycroft, Brock and Frampton, possibly as advisers rather than as executants<sup>27</sup>. A private letter from Sir Reginald Blomfield to Sir Lionel Earle, Permanent Secretary at the Office of Works, is amongst the company secretary's papers. It gives the names of several sculptors whom Blomfield recommends, and must presumably have been passed on to a member of the war memorial committee by Earle<sup>28</sup>. At Llanbadern Fawr, near Aberystwyth, John Ballinger, the Librarian of the National Library of Wales, used his connections with connoisseurs and artists to acquire detailed recommendations on Celtic strapwork for their

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> L.Pomeroy, 'The Making of a War Memorial', Town Planning Review, v.9, n.4, 1921, p.215

<sup>25</sup> Public Record Office, RAIL 258/447, Great Western Railway, Annual General Meeting Extract, 24 Feb. 1921

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 11 June 1919.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. no date

<sup>28</sup> Public Record Office, RAIL 258/447, letter 10 Jan. 1921

cross, as well as getting the prominent Welsh sculptor Sir William Goscombe John to provide a layout for the inscription<sup>29</sup>.

Walter Brierley's clients came to him through both formal and informal channels. He was recommended to the Vicar of Horbling, Lincolnshire, through the Royal Academy, to the Parish Clerk of Duckmanton, near Chesterfield, by the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, and to the Vicar of Wragley, Yorkshire, by the Dean of York. Elland war memorial committee picked him out from the work shown at Leeds Civic Society's exhibition of war memorial designs. But a great deal of Brierley's memorial work came from personal contacts, especially former domestic and church clients who already knew and relied on him<sup>30</sup>.

Many memorial committees already included members who understood and valued professional aesthetic standards, and who could encourage their colleagues to have confidence in artists' judgement and methods of work. As building was frequently undertaken by local authorities, some councillors and their officials had experience of public commissions. Borough or district surveyors and engineers were on hand to be consulted by councillors. Town clerks, who often serviced war memorial committees as honorary secretaries, were used to handling the legal aspects of local government building. Wealthy mayors sometimes marked their time in office by donating an item of public improvement to their towns. Colonel T.W.Harding of Leeds, a former Lord Mayor, who had privately commissioned plans for the new City Square in 1896, and presented statuary for it<sup>31</sup>, was entrusted

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<sup>29</sup> National Library of Wales, Minor Deposit, 321 B, Llanbadern Fawr Parish War Memorial papers, letter from J.Ballinger to R.T.Greer, 28 May 1919

<sup>30</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 105, passim

<sup>31</sup> E.P.Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth Century Local Government, London 1973, p.282



with the chairmanship of Leeds war memorial committee in 1921.

The Royal Artillery's General Furse was well acquainted with the arts. He understood the system according to which sculptors usually expected to be paid (one third of the price at three stages of the work). He either was a personal friend of the architect Sir Herbert Baker, or rapidly struck up a close relationship with him (more probably the former). He was often called upon to report on the progress of work on the Regiment's memorial and to explain the thinking behind Jagger's changes in the design. Leaders of county society like J.P.Yeoman of Brompton and Lord Derwent, both in Yorkshire, knew a good deal about architecture, having commissioned work from Walter Brierley (in Yeoman's case a large house<sup>32</sup>). Both these men appear to have involved themselves in the politics of their parishes, led the movements for war memorials there, and formed the artistic requirements for the memorials very largely themselves in consultation with Brierley.

A number of artists and architects who took an interest in local affairs, as councillors, members of voluntary organisations, and officers of public institutions, joined their fellow citizens on committees, and could contribute to their discussions from their own specialist knowledge. One such was G.A.Humphreys, FRIBA, Member of the Town Planning Institute, J.P., antiquarian, and a Governor of the University of Wales. He was a member of the committee of the North Wales Heroes' Memorial, which consists of an agricultural science building and a memorial arch at University College, Bangor. He wrote to the registrar of the college suggesting an idea for a memorial oratory, giving both archaeological justification for the type of

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<sup>32</sup> C.Carus, 'Walter Henry Brierley, 1862-1926, York Architect', unpublished dissertation for Diploma in Conservation Studies, University of York, 1973, p.66

building, from Celtic tradition, and an argument about how the effects of light and shade could be best created 'from pinnacles, buttresses and deeply recessed arches',<sup>33</sup>. Humphreys later offered other detailed suggestions. The building 'must show a structure which is a beauty of rightness and simplicity'. The arch 'is one of the most interesting types of war memorials which history reveals to us'. It should be classical, he said, ('we must pass over the mediaeval period'), and went on to praise McKim's Washington Square monument in New York<sup>34</sup>. In the event, harmony with the existing neo-gothic buildings of the College overrode Humphrey's stylistic preference.

### 3. Relations Between Artists and Clients

Once appointed, artists' relations with clients became subject to the regulations of contract which in some ways subjected the artists to the control of their clients. The contract was likely to include stipulations about the extent to which the artist must get the client's approval of any changes made in the original design. The contract which the Guards Division memorial committee made with the sculptor Gilbert Ledward and architect Harold Bradshaw reserved to the clients the right to request changes, and included arrangements whereby any changes the artists wanted to make were subject to approval by the committee or its officers. It was very precise in its grading of changes and the authority required for them. It stated that 'the dimensions...shall correspond in all general particulars' to the drawings and specifications of the approved design, and 'no appreciable change' in form from the model could be made

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<sup>33</sup> University College of North Wales, Bangor, Department of Manuscripts, North Wales Heroes Memorial, letter from Humphreys to Lloyd, 24 Feb. 1918

<sup>34</sup> Bangor, Heroes' Memorial, letter from Humphreys to Wheldon, 13 Feb. 1922, (emphasis in the original).



without the written consent of the committee. But 'in the event of the sculptor from time to time considering it desirable from an artistic point of view to make variations in the Sculptural work whether by way of artistic addition or omission such as slight alterations in the position and attitude of the figures or in the pattern of mouldings [etc.] not involving any substantial alteration in the general design', then Ledward should inform the committee, and if no objection was made in seven days, he could go ahead<sup>35</sup>.

In practice, the need to refer new developments in a design to the client committee did not usually result in the artist being forced to conform to the aesthetic preferences of the latter. That would have defeated the point of employing a reputable artist in the first place. Contractual stipulations appear, rather, to have functioned as a way of preserving consensus about the design in the memorial committee, and to maintain public support for it. In choosing a design, a war memorial committee's first task was to consider the possibilities on offer for memorials and build up a consensus around one of them. Once it was entrusted with donations from the public, and a choice of memorial had been made by or on behalf of the subscribers, the committee had to be seen to conduct its business appropriately, and provide the memorial for which the subscriptions had been given. Maintaining the consensus built up around the chosen design was thus important to the success and public acceptability of the memorial project. Changes which the artist made to the original proposal might threaten the consensus once it was formed, and committees had to guard against this possibility.

John Tweed suggested to Barnsley war memorial committee that he should omit a bronze panel representing victory, as a way

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<sup>35</sup> Public Record Office, WORK 20/142, schedules to contract June 1925.

of cutting the cost of the memorial which was exceeding the money available (£11.46). The committee refused to accept the idea on the grounds that the panel had been part of the design mentioned in the appeal for funds. People had subscribed on the strength of that design and if it was omitted 'adverse comment might arise',<sup>36</sup>. The committee's worry was probably aggravated by political sensitivity over whether or not celebration of victory should be part of the commemoration of the dead, though no one said so. For the North Wales Heroes' Memorial, a proposal was made to replace an oratory containing the names of the dead in the original design by a sculpture as the monumental component of the project. The college's building committee was prepared to consider the idea because it thought there were too many names (eight or ten thousand) to be accommodated on the oratory walls. The change was rejected by the memorial executive committee because a promise had been made to subscribers to record the names of the dead 'in a building dedicated to memorial purposes',<sup>37</sup>.

Although contractual controls existed, shortage of funds was more likely to interfere drastically with an artist's intentions than a committee's criticism of a proposed design or its execution. Costs rose considerably in the early 1920s. In July 1918 Messrs Hedley, architectural sculptors of Newcastle-upon-Tyne were paying 1/8d per hour to their carvers. By October 1919 it was 2/-, in May 1920 2/3d. In 1923 the rate settled, subsequently varying only between 1/7d and 1/8d<sup>38</sup>. Increased costs raised the price of Hackness memorial, designed by Brierley, from £85 to £118

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<sup>36</sup> Barnsley, Town Clerk's In Letters, File 35, letter to Tweed, 4 Dec. 1924

<sup>37</sup> Bangor, Heroes' Memorial, Building Committee, min. 12 Feb. 1921; Executive Committee, min. 27 Apr. 1921.

<sup>38</sup> Tyne & Wear Archives, TWAS 142/17, order book.



between February and September 1920<sup>39</sup>. At Barnsley, the committee revised its estimate of the donations it could raise from £8000 down to £5000. The whole original design was dropped and a new one adopted, it being agreed 'the new design should be more in the nature of a memorial to those who fell in the Great War rather than symbolical of victory over the enemy'<sup>40</sup>. At the first meeting between the Guards Division's memorial committee and the sculptor and architect of the winning competition entry, Gilbert Ledward and Harold Bradshaw, the committee immediately ruled out two stone figure groups, intended to go at either side, as too costly<sup>41</sup>. Charles Carus Wilson's design for Sheffield had a sculpted bronze base incorporating eight different figures. These were eventually reduced to four, all identical, to cut costs (ill.25). In this case, both the architect and a leading committee member regarded the change as an improvement<sup>42</sup>.

Committees frequently left the choice not only of designer but also of a specific design in the hands of experienced professionals by holding a competition with a respected architect or sculptor as assessor. Competitions had become a familiar aspect of the commissioning of public buildings in the nineteenth century. They had frequently proved frustrating to architects who entered them, because clients were able to take ideas from various submissions and combine them into a composite project, rather than awarding a

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<sup>39</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 105, letters from Aneley to Brierley, 23 Feb. 1920, and 31 Aug. 1920.

<sup>40</sup> Barnsley, Town Clerk's In Letters, File 35, letters 12 & 19 Dec. 1921

<sup>41</sup> Public Record Office, WORK 20/142, letter from Blomfield to Earle (enclosing committee minutes), 22 Jan. 1922

<sup>42</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (17), report of meeting 24 Sept. 1924; letters 25, 29, 30 Sept. 1924

commission to the winner<sup>43</sup>. During the early twentieth century the growing influence and discipline of the RIBA had led to a tightening of competition rules, and assessors' judgements were accorded greater authority. A competition now offered the opportunity of seeing a wide range of work before a committee, with the advice of the professional assessor, tied itself to one artist. Competitions might be open, or limited to artists invited by the assessor, as was the competition run by Walter Brierley for Ilkley war memorial<sup>44</sup>. In such a case, an assessor's knowledge and connections could be used to encourage suitable practitioners to compete. One architectural firm which Brierley invited to enter the Ilkley competition specifically said it was doing so because the rules were to the RIBA pattern, and another because it respected Brierley's judgement<sup>45</sup>.

The rules for competitions which were set by professional bodies gave considerable advantages to artists, and, as a result, artists generally made sure that the rules were upheld. The committee of the North Wales Heroes' Memorial wanted to hold a competition, largely to find another architect as an alternative to Henry Hare who had designed new buildings for University College, Bangor, before the war. Several senior members of the College had found Hare difficult to work with and were reluctant to try him again. Sir Aston Webb, then President of the RIBA, was asked to act as assessor. He refused. He pointed out that the College could find nothing in Hare's work to complain of, and only

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<sup>43</sup> Roger H. Harper, Victorian Architectural Competitions: An Index to British and Irish Competitions in the Builder, 1843-1900, London 1983. p.xiii

<sup>44</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 104, Ilkley War Memorial, Conditions and Instructions relative to the submission of Competitive Designs, drawn up by W. Brierley

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. letters from Lanchester and Rickards, 27 May 1919, and from R.S. Weir, 23 May 1919



'serious dissatisfaction' could justify giving the job of extending Hare's building to another architect<sup>46</sup>. Webb also said to the College's President, Lord Kenyon, face to face, that he doubted 'any architect of reputation would compete...in the circumstances of [this] case'<sup>47</sup>.

At Hereford, after one design was abandoned due to shortage of funds, the designer who was approached to supply an alternative withdrew because RIBA conditions had not been met<sup>48</sup>. Walter Brierley stood strongly by the rules when clients infringed them. He objected on several occasions when he discovered that a design he had specifically made at the request of a committee was in competition with other designs although no competition had been announced. He usually received apologies explaining that the committee had not been aware that such rules existed.

The RBS attempted to develop the same kind of discipline as the RIBA, though with less success. The war memorial committee at Leominster, Herefordshire, asked the RBS to organise a competition for them but then rejected the conditions the society set for entry. The society urged members 'not to enter into any competition which may be advertised in connection with that town, without ascertaining from your Secretary whether the conditions are fair and reasonable'<sup>49</sup>. It also said that the secretary would enquire into 'the bona fides of any competition advertised' if a member requested him to<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> Bangor, Heroes' Memorial, letter from Webb to Kenyon, 25 Feb. 1919

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. letter from Kenyon to Lloyd, 25 Feb. 1919

<sup>48</sup> Builder, v.122, 24 Feb. 1922, p.290

<sup>49</sup> Royal Society of British Sculptors, Annual Report of Council and Accounts, 1920, p.8

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p.9

Informal relationships amongst colleagues could help to sustain artists' authority in their relations with clients, and to defend their working practices and business interests. When an artist was appointed on the recommendation of an older established artist, the latter often gave practical support to the former in executing the commission. Walter Brierley acted thus in support of the winner he chose for the war memorial competition at Ilkley, J.J.Joass. Ilkley war memorial committee complained to Brierley that the estimates for building Joass's design were far too high. Brierley then corresponded with Joass, who was based in London, suggesting local suppliers and contractors who could offer cheaper materials and labour. He also proposed several alterations in the design which Joass gratefully accepted. He wrote to Brierley, 'I am very much obliged to you for taking the matter up in this way and if you have any further suggestions to make I shall be glad to fall in with them',<sup>51</sup>. E.V.Harris, who assessed the competition for Sheffield war memorial, found a sculptor to execute the bronze base to C. Carus Wilson's winning design, and suggested that he use a steel flagstaff rather than the wooden one he had originally proposed<sup>52</sup>. After seeing Charles Jagger's unconventional figure of a soldier for Hoylake and West Kirby war memorial, Sir George Frampton, who had recommended Jagger to the memorial committee, wrote reassuringly to congratulate them on obtaining 'certainly one of the best, if not the best, statue I have seen in recent years',<sup>53</sup>.

The support of an assessor did not always enhance an individual artist's personal authority with a client. Sir

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<sup>51</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 104, letter from Joass to Brierley, 31 Aug. 1920

<sup>52</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (16), letter from C.Carus Wilson, 14 Feb. 1924, and report of meeting 30 July 1924

<sup>53</sup> Wirral, ZWO/16, letter from Frampton to Sir A.V.Paton, 2 Mar. 1921



Reginald Blomfield, who was co-assessor with Sir Thomas Brock of the Guards' memorial competition, took a very close interest in Ledward and Bradshaw's winning design. He suggested many modifications, and strongly defended what he liked in it against criticism from members of the memorial committee and the Office of Works<sup>54</sup>. Lord Crawford, First Commissioner of Works, believed that Blomfield had taken over the design, to the detriment of its sculptural side, and the unassertive Ledward was being pushed into decisions he did not really like<sup>55</sup>. Blomfield's intervention may have made things worse rather than better for Ledward, but whatever aesthetic authority the younger man seemed to lack in facing the committee, Blomfield did his best to make up for.

Architects who were members of memorial committees were sometimes given special responsibility for communicating with the architects who were designing the memorials. G.A.Humphreys was given the job of checking and contesting architects' accounts by the North Wales Heroes' Memorial committee, and he made a personal approach to the laboratory specialist A.E.Munby, asking him to design their memorial science block<sup>56</sup>. The architect W.Shackleton, a member of Pudsey war memorial committee, was left to deal with Walter Brierley, architect of the memorial, more or less as he saw fit. 'I have a pretty free hand given me by the committee in deciding the design finally adopted', he told

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<sup>54</sup> The Office of Works was concerned in the project because its site was in a royal park. The First Commissioner was supposed to approve the design, and the views of the King had to be taken into account.

<sup>55</sup> Public Record Office, WORK 20/142, memorandum, 25 Feb. 1922

<sup>56</sup> Bangor, Heroes' Memorial, Executive Committee mins. 11 Mar. 1922, and 25 Mar. 1922

Brierley<sup>57</sup>. An element of professional conspiracy crept into their relationship. The mayor of Pudsey asked Shackleton to oversee the work of erecting the memorial personally. Shackleton thought this neither necessary nor appropriate, but did not tell the mayor so. He wrote to Brierley: 'I think you will quite understand what I mean, and that there is no necessity for the Mayor being told how I have expressed myself in connection with this...'<sup>58</sup>.

Occasionally, clients had strong ideas of their own about how to deal with aspects of a design which they felt fell within their own experience. In such circumstances artists had to defend their status as experts against encroachment. Charles Jagger had to justify his use of bulky clothing in the figures for the Royal Artillery memorial many times to committee members who felt that the costume of his figures was unrepresentative. He argued that a large bronze form 'holds its own better against a large mass of masonry'<sup>59</sup>. By saying this, he made the question of costume one which properly belonged in his field of expertise as a plastic artist, rather than a question of accuracy in the representation of military details, which was the expertise of his clients. The committee made many suggestions for details, which Jagger often welcomed when they were concerned with the accurate representation of artillery equipment and practices. He told the committee 'I am most anxious to conform to these criticisms...except beyond the point where to do so would seriously affect the design as a work of art', but he begged them to 'let me proceed with

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<sup>57</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 50, letter from W.Shackleton 20 Mar. 1920

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 29 July 1921

<sup>59</sup> Royal Artillery, Annual General Meeting, 17 Apr 1923



working models', for when these were finished most 'criticism would disappear',<sup>60</sup>.

The artist's last line of defence against interference was refusal to co-operate. Jagger wrote a letter of resignation to the war memorial committee of the Great Western Railway as a result of its persistent attempts to find an alternative to the one design he was really pleased with. The company's chief engineer called personally within a few days, and the company secretary then wrote that the directors 'have every desire that you should carry it through',<sup>61</sup>. W.H.Wood refused to include the names of the local vicar and himself, as architect, in the layout for an inscription on a memorial he had designed, on the grounds that the memorial was to the dead. If the client disliked this, he would have to look elsewhere for a design. He apologised if his refusal was 'too outspoken, but this is the way I feel',<sup>62</sup>.

The rules set by artists were not absolute. Although a committee had little option but to employ an assessor if it held an architectural competition, it could avoid accepting the results. Brierley's conditions for the Ilkley competition defined his own role as 'to select the Architects...who are to be invited, to advise the Committee on the relative merits of the designs submitted and to recommend the design to be carried out, his decision thereon to be final and binding on all parties',<sup>63</sup>. However, the

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<sup>60</sup> Royal Artillery, letter from Jagger to Sclater, 7 Apr. 1923

<sup>61</sup> Public Record Office, RAIL 258/447, letters from Jagger to Bolter, 4 July 1921 and from Bolter to Jagger, 12 July 1921

<sup>62</sup> Tyne and Wear, TWAS 52/80, letter from Wood to Dunn, 28 Mar. 1918. Although Wood was prepared to be strict with a social equal, he was deferential enough not to object to naming Lord Durham, who was to unveil the memorial.

<sup>63</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 104, clause 2.

committee's responsibility was qualified. The conditions continued: 'It is the intention of the Committee to accept the Award of the Assessor, and to entrust the carrying out of the work to the author of the design selected by him', with the proviso that if it should prove too expensive, another may be selected with the assessor's advice. But the committee did not 'bind itself to carry out any one of the designs submitted',<sup>64</sup>. The competition conditions for Sheffield war memorial also specified that the committee was not committed to executing the winning design, but would do so unless there were 'valid reasons to the contrary',<sup>65</sup>.

Ultimately, therefore, a client's acceptance of the professional authority of an artist was voluntary. Nonetheless, the publicity and increasing discipline of artists' organisations seems to have left them in a stronger position than they had been before the Great War. Comparison with earlier practice in commissioning monuments suggests that the inclination of clients to seek the advice of professional artists, and to accept the rules and aesthetic standards artists wanted to impose, was greater after the First World War than before it. In Glasgow, no serious debate was conducted about the form which the city's memorials to Gladstone (1899), Kelvin (1908) or Lord Roberts (1915) should take. In each case an uncontested resolution was passed that a portrait statue would be commissioned. For the first two, the executive of the memorial committee chose designs itself, the third was a copy of an existing work in Calcutta<sup>66</sup>. The South Shields Victoria memorial

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. clause 6.

<sup>65</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (2), 'Conditions and Instructions for Competition Designs', Oct. 1923

<sup>66</sup> Strathclyde, G4.1, Gladstone, Kelvin and Roberts Memorials, mins. 15 Feb. 1899, 5 May 1908, 13 Jan. 1915



committee appears to have judged competition entries itself<sup>67</sup>.

#### 4. The Importance of Professionalism in Art

Why did committee members give so much respect to the views of artists and critics? It was always important that a memorial, whatever its type, should be a worthy thank offering to the dead. In the case of a utilitarian memorial, a generous or caring intention, backed by an adequate fund, would suffice. If the memorial was to be a work of art, it was its artistic quality which made it worthy. For the most part, members of war memorial committees would not have seen themselves, or have been seen by the local community, as expert judges of art. They had been appointed to organise, raise money and rally support for the memorial project; for their standing in the community rather than their knowledge of art. To ensure that the memorials they commissioned were of a kind to reflect well both on the people they intended to commemorate, and on the community doing the commemorating, they welcomed opportunities to take professional artistic advice. The diffidence of some committee members was expressed by General Horne of the Royal Artillery. He did not have, he said, the 'ability to express any strong opinion'. In his view, 'we should take the opinion of those who are better able to judge and take advantage in every possible way of their view, for we do want [the memorial] to represent the acme of art as well as the regiment',<sup>68</sup>.

The competition procedure could be useful to clients in resolving deadlocked disputes over memorials. At Sheffield

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<sup>67</sup> Tyne and Wear, T95/93, mins. 15 Feb. 1909, 21 Jan. 1911, 9 Feb. 1911

<sup>68</sup> Royal Artillery, Central Committee, min. 12 Nov. 1924

a competition open to designers practising in Sheffield was held in 1923<sup>69</sup>. The assessor was E.V.Harris, the architect of the proposed new city hall, in front of which the memorial was to stand. Harris had himself designed a memorial at the request of a sub-committee of the city council for this site. When the design was published there was an outcry against it, largely because no effective public discussion about what sort of memorial to have had taken place. After four months of argument in committees and in the local newspapers, no public consensus about a design had emerged, and the council decided that a competition should be held. Even though Harris chose an unconventional design, consisting of a massive flagpole on a bronze base ornamented with figures, and expected opposition to his choice<sup>70</sup>, the Council approved it 'with very little adverse criticism'<sup>71</sup>, and the controversy was closed.

Likewise, the authority of the approved designer could be useful to committees in resolving their internal differences. The Vicar of South Kirkby, near Wakefield, who was a personal acquaintance of Walter Brierley's, had his own ideas about what to do as a parish memorial, and wanted to use Brierley's advice to back his case before his committee. He explained his ideas to Brierley and then said, 'On hearing from you I shall try to force my committee to collect more money and carry out your suggestions. But I need your advice and to be able to lay your thoughts before the meeting'<sup>72</sup>. At Pudsey, W.Shackleton enlisted Brierley's authority as designer to persuade the committee

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<sup>69</sup> Sheffield Record Office, CA 653, especially (1)-(6) and (16)

<sup>70</sup> Sheffield CA 653 (16), letter from E.V.Harris 10 Mar. 1924

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. letter to E.V.Harris 14 Mar. 1924

<sup>72</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 108, letter from H.Wellington 30 Apr. 1918



that it was improper to name the current mayor on the memorial, and that only the names of the dead should appear<sup>73</sup>.

As I have already stressed, for a memorial project to be a success it was generally necessary to establish a consensus amongst a variety of local organisations and individuals who could help to undertake its production. The employment of a reputable and qualified artist could contribute to establishing and maintaining consensus around the object chosen for the memorial. Memorial committees were responsible to their communities for the memorial's production, and had to be able to rely on their artists to provide an appropriate product and to satisfy the public's expectations. If artists justified the confidence committees placed in them, then the committees could, at the same time, justify the confidence of the public in their own leadership.

Not all committees saw the need to consult or employ a professional designer. They bought a standard product from a catalogue or used a local mason instead. But where committees were reluctant to go to a professional, a member with some authority within the committee might press the others to go to one. The Rector of Bainton, near York wrote to Brierley to say, 'I have persuaded the committee to seek competent artistic advice as to site, material and design, and they have allowed me to write to you and three others',<sup>74</sup>. In other places the decision may have gone the other way. To judge from available correspondence, clubs, small firms and local authority schools tended not to

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<sup>73</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 50, letters from W.Shackleton, 21 June 1920 & 14 Oct. 1920. The correspondence on this matter is quoted in the next chapter.

<sup>74</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 108, letter from M.Driffield 18 Dec. 1919

consult professional artists for their memorials, perhaps thinking they could not afford it.

The records of the war memorial committees at Brancepeth, Durham, and Northop, Flintshire, contain several catalogues of standard memorial designs from monumental masons, collected by their vicars<sup>75</sup>. The variety of products offered in them suggests that these firms expected a brisk trade in memorials. Professional artists' organisations were worried about the competition from manufacturers of this sort. A common implication in their advice to seek professional help was that items available from monumental masons and church furnishing firms were not suitable as war memorials and should be avoided. A circular from the RBS 'noted with regret that in many cases stereotyped designs supplied by trade firms are being used'<sup>76</sup>. Their worry was echoed in official advice from the Diocesan War Memorial Committee at Chichester, itself acting on advice from the Diocesan Architect. It warned that 'the catalogues of furnishing firms are not safe guides'<sup>77</sup>.

The warnings issued by professional artists and their supporters against such firms were not entirely fair. Several were prepared to undertake original designs, as well as their range of standard products. The Memorials Department of the Army and Navy Auxiliary Co-operative Supply, Ltd., London, sent the Vicar of Northop a hand-drawn design for a brass tablet, endorsed in pencil at the bottom 'original design'<sup>78</sup>. Design No.204 for a wall tablet in

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<sup>75</sup> Durham, D/Br/E 45 (8)&(9); Clwyd, P/45/1/379

<sup>76</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, circular received 9 May 1921

<sup>77</sup> Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, series 3, v.25, July 1918, p.210.

<sup>78</sup> Clwyd, P/45/1/379, letter to Vicar of Northop, 21 June 1919.



the firm's catalogue was attributed to M.C.Oliver, ARCA, indicating that the designer was professionally qualified.

In general the attraction of buying a memorial from a manufacturer must have been cheapness, although the unfamiliarity of the process of commissioning from an independent sculptor or architect may have seemed a disincentive to some people. Certainly, buying off-the-shelf memorials only occurred in small communities or organisations. Most civil communities and large commercial institutions had pressing reasons to look for the assurance of a fully professional and original job, whose quality showed the communal offering to be sincerely made. They had a considerable amount of money, a diverse public to satisfy, requiring great care in the preservation of consensus, and a civic reputation to maintain.

The service offered by artists and required by clients was, above all, professional competence. An artist's personal vision of the subject of a memorial was not considered particularly relevant to this kind of commission, whether by clients, critics or artists themselves. Most clients showed little interest in artists' capacity for individual expression, although a distinctive rather than a merely conventional work of art might increase their satisfaction. Artists did not usually offer their own personal expression or their personal responses to the subject of commemoration. They did not claim to have any special personal insight into the meaning of war and death. On the contrary, they offered the technical skill and experience required to express the feelings of others, a sense of propriety, and an understanding of the goals local committees set for themselves.

There were some exceptions. Michael Sadler, the vice-chancellor of Leeds University, commissioned Eric Gill to produce the university war memorial precisely because he

believed that the value of the sculptor's work lay in his personal vision. Sadler expected an idiosyncratic interpretation of the war based on Gill's religious and political ideas which Sadler himself, to some extent, shared. Sadler had exclusive control of the fund from which the memorial would be provided (a legacy to the university to be used at his personal discretion), and thus many of the problems normally presented by the formation of a consensus around the design did not arise<sup>79</sup>. Others who might have claimed that their work was informed by special personal insight did not do so. Although Charles Jagger maintained to a newspaper that his depiction of soldiers in his memorial designs was based on the personal knowledge of them gained from his own war service<sup>80</sup>, he did not press this point with his clients. Neither Gilbert Ledward nor Charles Carus Wilson, who both also served in the war (Carus Wilson receiving, like Jagger, the Military Cross) appear to have claimed any special authority as a result of their personal experience.

Artists provided their clients with the expertise they wanted, and in return, exacted a price in more than money. The price was recognition of their professional authority. This recognition gave artists a prominent place in determining how the commemoration of the war dead should be given material form. Ultimately, the intervention of clients did not have a strong effect on the aesthetic quality or visual symbolism of memorials. Both were principally the result of the professional judgement and practices of artists. It was very much what Professor

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<sup>79</sup> Leeds University Archive, Film 131, f.9, letters from Sadler to Gill, 14 and 31 Jan. 1920, and C.Cross to Sadler, 10 Sept. 1917. See also G.R.Kent, 'Sadler, Gill and the Money Changers', in Michael Sadler, University Gallery, Leeds 1989, pp.34-38

<sup>80</sup> J.Glaves-Smith, 'Realism and Propaganda', in A.Compton (ed), Charles Sargent Jagger, War and Peace Sculpture, London 1985, p.52



Beresford-Pite had hoped for in 1917, when he had said that the public would expect 'inspiration and guidance' from the architectural profession<sup>81</sup>. Artists used the authority their clients gave them to ensure that war memorials were executed according to practices and canons of taste which were favoured by their professional leaders, and by the majority of ordinary practitioners. This undoubtedly satisfied the tastes of their clients as well, but it was not principally the result of pressure from clients.

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<sup>81</sup> See note 3, p.207

## Chapter 7

## The Transfiguration of Common People

The principal purpose of memorials and remembrance ceremonies was to remind the public of those members of their community who had fought and suffered in the war, most especially (but not exclusively) those who had died. However, commemoration did not simply encourage people to remember who the dead had been and what had happened to them, but to remember them in a particular way. It made assertions, explicitly or by implication, about them. Through its key images and figures of speech, commemoration expressed the shared assumption that the dead should be respected and that what they had done in the war should be valued. It attributed a number of virtues to them in order to justify holding them in honour. This chapter will examine the depiction of the dead propagated in commemoration, explore reasons why various groups of people should have found it credible, and consider its sources.

Memorials and remembrance ceremonies encouraged mourners to moderate or escape from grief by cultivating positive emotions towards the deaths of their friends and relatives. Pride in their achievements and in their character was especially emphasised. Alderman Raley of Barnsley said, unveiling Cudworth war memorial, that the memories retained by the bereaved were 'poignant but proud'<sup>1</sup>. In 1920 the Wesleyan Conference issued a statement that,

There is a pride that is permissible, a pride whose constituents are love and honour and high thought and deep feeling; and we are proud of the sons who have

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<sup>1</sup> Barnsley Chronicle, 31 July 1920



fought our battles and given their lives. But we mourn for them...<sup>2</sup>.

Inscriptions and images on memorials often explicitly stated that the memory of those whom they commemorated was special - proud, honoured, glorious. Sedgfield war memorial, County Durham, reads: 'Pass not this stone in sorrow but in pride, ...'. The design sub-committee for Barnsley war memorial extended the inscription suggested by both the sculptor and a committee member - 'to the memory',<sup>3</sup> of the town's dead - to read 'in honoured memory'. At Llanymynech on the Shropshire-Montgomeryshire border, the committee overruled its sub-committee on inscriptions, which had proposed plain 'in memory', and substituted 'in proud and grateful memory'<sup>4</sup>. The point was not simply to remember who the dead had been and what had happened to them, but to honour their memory.

Designs for memorials shared in the attempt to lift the thoughts of viewers above physical death. Heart, Son, Peart and Co. of London wrote to the vicar of Northop, Flintshire, that they were 'trying as far as possible to get away from the funereal appearance of tablets and especially in the case of War Memorials to make them somewhat varied in colour without being tawdry'<sup>5</sup>. The sculptor W.G. Storr-Barber proposed a design for Llandrindod Wells memorial in which he represented 'the British soldier as he was in the Great War', pointing out that the expression on the face of the figure would be one of 'hope and thoughtfulness rather than

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<sup>2</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/25, untitled press cutting, 16 July 1920

<sup>3</sup> Barnsley, Town Clerk's In Letters, File 35, letters from John Tweed, 1 Jan. 1925, and from Ald. Raley 12 Aug. 1925

<sup>4</sup> Shropshire, 1919/1, mins. 6 June 1921 and 15 June 1921

<sup>5</sup> Clwyd, P/45/1/379, letter, 5 June 1919

one of mournful sorrow or regret'<sup>6</sup>. The village war memorial at Stanway, Gloucestershire, carries an inscription that amounts to a table of appropriate transformations of feeling for those who contemplated the dead'<sup>7</sup>. It reads:

For a tomb they have an altar  
For lamentation memory  
And for pity praise

One justification for holding a great national ceremony in memory of the dead, and for the many more local commemorative events, was to give more than a purely personal significance to their memory. Even if only as a consolation to the bereaved, there was a desire to give the awareness of death a greater sense of importance than a purely personal loss. The simple fact that the community honoured the dead would help to console the bereaved, the Enfield Gazette said. 'Be it ours to pour in the balm of consolation to the stricken, and to convince them that, as a people, we hold in honour the gallant and unforgettable dead'<sup>8</sup>.

Undoubtedly, the commemoration of the dead was laden with powerful emotions, but the portrait it drew of them was not the product simply of feeling amongst those who mourned. The commemorative view of the dead was shaped by a repertoire of images and moral ideas which predate the war, but which were developed and intensified during it.

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<sup>6</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, letter, 14 Sept. 1920

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Tom Gretton for drawing my attention to this memorial.

<sup>8</sup> Enfield Gazette, 18 July 1919



### 1.Characterising the Dead

We saw in chapter 3 the wide variety of purposes people believed their war memorials should serve; but whatever secondary purposes they might have been given, they were judged first of all by the contribution they made to prompting the right kind of memory, and the right kind of feelings and actions, in those who saw or used them. In ceremonies, the central focus on remembering was supplied by the Great Silence; but much more was said in the sermons, speeches and writings associated with Armistice Day and other occasions for remembrance. Thus memorials and ceremonies took on as much a didactic as a commemorative character.

Speeches at unveilings and on other ceremonial occasions frequently proposed characteristics which the public should attribute to the dead, principally: self-sacrifice, comradeship and the love of peace. At Saint Michael's church, Poplar, Major General Sir Nevill Smyth V.C. told the congregation for the unveiling of the war memorial that, 'We honour these men of Poplar today not so much for what they did as for what they were. Under their ever cheerful demeanour smouldered the fires of patriotism and self-sacrifice'. They were 'always honourable, merciful, gentle and chivalrous'<sup>9</sup>. (His remarks were greeted with cheers.) The audience at the unveiling of Stockport memorial was told that the dead had, 'without flinching, faced the horrors and deprivations of war, and willingly gave their lives for others and for the country they loved so well'<sup>10</sup>. Mr Alec Paterson, holder of the Military Cross, told the congregation in Saint Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey, when he unveiled the memorial there, that the dead 'were men of peace; they had no wish for war, but when danger threatened

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<sup>9</sup> East End News, 10 Dec. 1920

<sup>10</sup> Stockport, opening and unveiling ceremony, 15 Oct. 1925

the homes of the people, they left behind all they counted most dear... Cheerfully they fought, cheerfully they endured, and uncomplainingly they fell'<sup>11</sup>.

The term 'The Great Sacrifice', which had formerly been used by Christians to refer to Christ's death<sup>12</sup>, was regularly applied to death in the war; the great sacrifice being, in this case, the willing self-sacrifice of those who had given their lives to defend others. The self-sacrifice of the dead was said to have made the most crucial contribution to victory. At the unveiling of the North Eastern Railway memorial in York, Lord Plumer, one of the British commanders in France, said, 'We all know that it was not we, no matter in what rank, who went out to the various theatres of operations and came back that won the war. It was those who went out and did not come back. It was their sacrifice which gained us victory'<sup>13</sup>. Their self-sacrifice had also been a great moral achievement. By becoming the victims of war they had triumphed over it, and by losing their lives they had acquired spiritual strength. In an article entitled 'The Meaning of the Silence', published in 1930, the Daily Mail explained that 'they faced Evil, and...though their bodies were destroyed by it, their souls overcame it' and achieved 'victory over violence and wrong'<sup>14</sup>.

According to the programme for the opening of Birmingham's Hall of Memory, in 1925, the dead had 'been made mighty by sacrifice'<sup>15</sup>.

Self-sacrifice, an individual virtue, was accompanied by the collective virtue of comradeship. Cheltenham war memorial

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<sup>11</sup> Southwark, YX 14, untitled press cutting 1923

<sup>12</sup> See chapter 5, p.170

<sup>13</sup> Yorkshire Herald, 16 June 1924

<sup>14</sup> Daily Mail, 10 Nov. 1930

<sup>15</sup> Birmingham Post, 4 July 1925



says of those it commemorates: 'If they were strangers to one another here in their common home, they served and wrought and died in many lands near and far as a band of brothers'. The solidarity amongst fighting men was elevated, in the imagery of remembrance, into an ideal of brotherly love, modelled on the Christian ideal of fraternal care. Probably the most popular of moralising inscriptions applied to war memorials combines brotherly love and self-sacrifice as interdependent virtues. It is some words of Christ's to his disciples from Saint John's Gospel: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'.

In general, the achievement of the dead was represented as an ethical triumph over evil rather than a military triumph over other people, although the soldierly nature of the triumph was ambiguously acknowledged. Artists generally avoided depicting acts of violence on war memorials. The military figures on Keighley war memorial, unveiled in 1924, were praised for being 'so balanced in poise as to give an impression of alertness and vigour, yet without any hint of aggressive force'<sup>16</sup> (ill.47). The same effect may have been intended in John Tweed's figures for Barnsley war memorial, unveiled in 1925 (ill.48), and for the memorial to the King's Royal Rifle Corps in Winchester, 1921 (ill.49), Alfred Drury's for the London Troops memorial, 1920 (ill.50), and William Goscombe John's figures for Port Sunlight, 1921, where the postures suggest waiting for, rather than preparing to assault, an enemy (ill.51)<sup>17</sup>. Figures on guard, like these, are far more common than scenes of attack. An unusually frank example of the latter is the Cameronians' memorial in Glasgow, 1924 (ill.33).

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<sup>16</sup> Keighley News, 6 Dec. 1924

<sup>17</sup> Note, in the Rifle Corps figure, the clenched fist, and the weight on the back foot, connoting determination to resist an opposing force, but not aggression. The principal figure at Port Sunlight also has his weight on the back foot.

Reference to victory in the imagery and inscriptions on a memorial was frequently given an ethical rather than a military connotation by combining it with a reference to peace. Keighley memorial, unveiled in 1924, is surmounted by a figure 'symbolising by the wreath in one hand and the palm branch in the other a "Peace Victory" won through service and sacrifice'<sup>18</sup>. A winged 'niké' at Finsbury, the classical figure of victory, carrying the same attributes, unveiled 1921, was 'symbolical of Peace and Victory'<sup>19</sup> (ill.52). These figures connoted either the victory of peace, or peace secured through victory. Thus, the purpose of the great struggle, and hence of those who had died in it, was represented as the achievement of peace, rather than victory for its own sake. Victory could also be worked into the imagery by invoking the Christian, and distinctly ethical, idea of victory over death through self-sacrifice. One of the inscriptions on Leeds war memorial, 1922, is 'Invictis Pax' - peace to the undefeated. It could mean either undefeated in war or undefeated by death, or both. The Bruce Provident Dividing Society in the east end of London honoured its members who had been killed with the inscription: 'A soldier's death. God giveth him the victor's wreath'<sup>20</sup>. An equally ambiguous expression, substituting the moral attribute of manliness for the religious conception of resurrection, was used at Gateshead: 'Unconquerable manhood'.

Artists sometimes disclaimed any wish to celebrate military triumph, even in memorials of strongly traditional design. The designer of the LNWR memorial at Euston station, 1921, wanted viewers to notice that 'the monument is essentially a memorial to the fallen and is devoid of any element which

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<sup>18</sup> Keighley News, 6 Dec. 1924

<sup>19</sup> Finsbury Weekly News, 16 Sept. 1921

<sup>20</sup> Tower Hamlets, Whiffin Collection 1369, photograph



might mark it as an emblem of victory,<sup>21</sup> (ill.21). The sculptor of Leeds war memorial, unveiled in 1922, H.C.Fehr, originally intended the sword carried by the figure of victory on top of the monument to be held pointing upwards (ill.53), but he later changed its position so that she held it by the blade, pointing downwards (ill.54). 'The explanation is that the sculptor proposed in the first place to show the sword held as if in token of triumph, but later modified his design',<sup>22</sup>.

Sometimes an emphasis on peace was stronger and more explicit. At Leeds, Fehr replaced a palm branch, which he had intended the lower figure of peace to hold, by the dove perched on her finger, perhaps to make her more recognisable (ill.55). The memorial at Thornton, a suburb of Bradford, sculpted by Harold Brownsword and unveiled in 1922, consists of a bronze figure of peace<sup>23</sup> holding laurel wreaths above the names of the dead (ill.56). At another Bradford suburb, Eccleshill, a bronze figure of peace, also by Brownsword and unveiled the same year, is 'taking away the sword of strife and bestowing the laurel wreath of honour',<sup>24</sup> (ill.57). All the same, there was considerable ambiguity in the nature of the peace alluded to. It could be interpreted either to mean that the dead had served the achievement of peace, who now honoured them, or that, as a result of honourable deaths, the dead were now at peace, freed from the strife of the world - a conventional funereal sentiment. Through these ambiguities, memorials could celebrate at once a triumph of arms and a triumph of a higher order - moral, even religious - which could not be achieved through armed force, but only by its rejection, by a triumph over violence

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<sup>21</sup> Public Record Office, RAIL 1057/2868, copy of account of design by R.Wynn Owen

<sup>22</sup> Yorkshire Evening Post, 16 Oct. 1922

<sup>23</sup> Bradford Daily Telegraph, 2 Oct. 1922

<sup>24</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 12 June 1922

itself. The unveiling dates of these memorials show that concern with peace and with ethical rather than military triumph was strong even in the immediate post-war years, and was not a product of the increase in pacifism and internationalism which occurred in the early thirties.

The religious imagery of martyrdom was frequently used to represent death in the war as the spiritual victory of victims of violence, and an analogy between the war dead and Christ's redemptive death hovered in the background. The term 'Great Sacrifice', and the frequency of crucifixes as memorials, made a direct connection between the dead and Christ. So too did the likening of Armistice Day to Good Friday<sup>25</sup>. A poem published in The Times about the proposed burial of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey, as representative of all the war dead, concluded:

Pass on, brave spirit.

Oh 'tis Christ that passes

In thee, poor soldier, who didst die for me<sup>26</sup>.

It was constantly said that the dead had been willing and cheerful in their self-sacrifice. The possibility that they might have gone to war other than willingly was not mentioned. The slogan 'For King and Country', which appeared in many memorial inscriptions, always carried the implication that the dead had acted out of devotion to both, not merely at their behest. The coercive state apparatus which emerged, even in Britain, in wartime, to provide adequate manpower, was hidden behind the sense of duty, patriotism or love of others attributed to the dead. Along with the power of central government, the rôle of local institutions and individuals in assisting the imposition of centralised discipline, through propaganda work and the

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<sup>25</sup> See chapter 1, p.29

<sup>26</sup> Times, 26 Oct. 1920



staffing of local recruitment agencies and tribunals, also went unmentioned. Thus, it was implied that the will to fight had been that of free agents acting out of a sense of justice and of duty to their communities, not of the political, social and military forces who held power over them.

In this characterisation of the dead, two forms of force crucial to warfare were obscured: first, homicidal acts performed by the dead, and second, the power of the state to demand violent acts from its subjects. By not referring to these things, the achievements of the dead could be presented as the outcome of moral and spiritual, rather than physical or political power. There were, however, alternative accounts of the war which stressed violence, brutality and incompetence, and so presented a challenge to the view that the dead had been either special or honourable. These accounts were frequently repudiated as dishonouring the dead.

Controversy on the subject was most intense in the years around 1930, when a large number of novels and memoirs appeared, representing the war in an anti-romantic light, but some accounts of this sort had been published much earlier. One which was probably widely read was Philip Gibbs's Realities of War, first published in 1920. Soldiers had been trained, he said, 'until they became automata at the word of command, lost their souls, as it seemed, in that grinding machine of military training'. The men he met at the front were disguising 'their fear of being afraid, their hatred of death'. He gave details of their own awareness of the immorality of things they did. He quoted one as mocking the propagandist's analogy between themselves and Christ, saying, 'I wonder if Christ would have stuck a bayonet into a German stomach - a German with his hands up? That's what we're asked to do'. He described in lurid detail the killing of 200 fleeing Germans, by British soldiers who

'were mad now, not humans in their senses.... They were beasts of prey, these decent Yorkshire lads'. He also mentioned that they went to prostitutes.

Gibbs's account is equivocal about the moral qualities of soldiers. He believed that training and propaganda induced a 'nervous stimulus', which could prompt them to do 'freakish and fantastic things of courage'. Yet he accepted that the men whose lives he described had indeed been courageous. That was why he had written the book. It was intended, he said, 'as a memorial of men's courage in tragic years'. He also believed that their courage had the power to transform contemporary attitudes, and wrote, 'it was the valour of these young soldiers who...were flung into hell-fires and killed in great numbers, which made all things different in the philosophy of modern life'<sup>27</sup>.

In the writing of Gibbs and others, the distinction between moral heroism and failure was acknowledged, at least tacitly, to be unclear, but this did not cast doubt on the idea that suffering and death in war was a moral achievement. Apparent moral failure induced by combat might itself be seen as another of the sufferings inflicted on the hero-victim. A.P. Herbert's novel The Secret Battle was published in 1919, telling the fictional story (though compiled from actual experiences) of an honest and courageous volunteer officer whose nerve cracked and who was shot for cowardice. In 1928 Winston Churchill was invited to write an introduction to a new edition. Churchill discussed the book as if it were a memorial to the war dead, a common position for reviewers to take when writing about the literature, fictional or otherwise, of war

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<sup>27</sup> P. Gibbs, Realities of War, London 1920, pp.59, 61, 82, 89, 129, 133, v, 65



experience<sup>28</sup>. The book was, Churchill said, 'a monument of the agony not of one but of millions, standing impassive in marble to give its message to all....who need a word of warning in their path. It speaks also with that strange note of consolation, often underlying tragedy, to those who...can never forget'. He even suggested that the story would inspire rather than appal future generations, saying, 'ardent, virile youth...will not be deterred by its story from doing their duty by their native land, if ever the need should come. They will face terrors and tortures, if need be, with the simple faith that "What man has done, man can do"',<sup>29</sup>.

There was, however, a distinction between different kinds of anti-romantic war narrative. Some, like Gibbs's, were accounts which pointed up the human frailty of soldiers, many of whom had been killed. In others, most famously Eric Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front, which appeared in 1928, the principal protagonists were killed. The latter, therefore, were explicitly portraits of the dead, appealing to the sense of tragedy and the sympathy generally attached to the war dead. They therefore posed a more direct challenge to the image of the dead as moral heroes than books which merely described the nastiness of war as a whole.

Two defences were possible against the threat posed to the moral stature of the dead by anti-romantic narratives. These seem broadly to match a political division between conservative, imperialist, and liberal, internationalist,

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<sup>28</sup> See R.M.Bracco, 'British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939', Ph.D thesis, Cambridge 1989, pp.150-152. Bracco gives an account of the critical reception of R.C.Sherriff's play Journey's End, illustrating well how far such literature was judged by standards derived from commemoration of the dead (although this is not an argument she actually puts forward).

<sup>29</sup> A.P.Herbert, The Secret Battle, London 1928, pp.6-7

views of the purpose of commemoration<sup>30</sup>. The first was to deny that this view of the war dead had any general validity. It might represent the experience and character of a few, but they were exceptional. In 1931, a correspondent signing himself 'Anzac' protested to Headway, the League of Nations Union's journal, about the current spate of 'bad war books', All Quiet on the Western Front in particular. He asked,

What will be the effect on the rising generation after reading some of the war literature? The death of a parent or relative is a very precious and revered memory in many households throughout the Empire, but the sons and daughters of fathers who went through the war, and in many cases were killed, are being told that the men whom they loved and admired were practically all drunkards or beasts, and that anyone who laid down his life was a fool<sup>31</sup>.

The authors, he believed, were,

hysterical neurotics who could not stand the strain of war, and who feel compelled now to unburden their minds regardless of the fact that they are sully the imperishable memory of the fallen and putting into the minds of the rising generation a distorted conception of the lives of the British troops who took part in the late war<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> The division may appear obvious at first sight, but given the degree of flexibility which existed in interpretations of the political purpose of commemoration (see chapter 8), it should not be taken for granted. It would have been possible for political Conservatives to subscribe to the liberal view here, even if the reverse were unlikely.

<sup>31</sup> Headway, v.13, n.7, July 1931, p.128

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



He argued that such books should be subject to the same kind of censorship as films. For him, remembrance of the dead provided the basis on which revelations about the corruption and unpleasantness of wartime behaviour could be set in the context of a deeper 'truth' which centred on moral achievement, suffering for others, the teaching of an essential lesson at the price of their own destruction.

A more liberal view, which accepted that the anti-romantic account of the war had much truth in it, was expressed by correspondents in Headway who replied to Anzac's criticism. Cicely Wilcox had read All Quiet and found it a revelation. 'I quite see the danger', she wrote, 'of coming generations generalising from these hysterical books, but everyone ought to know the unmentionable side which none of the decent men will speak about...'<sup>33</sup>. G.H.Cooper thought that the authors wanted to show the inevitably debasing results of war. He wrote,

No one believes the fallen were "practically all drunkards and beasts", but every truthful man knows that war is capable of dragging men down to a depth of degradation which would be a disgrace if they sought it willingly<sup>34</sup>.

One could, indeed should, acknowledge the awful truth about behaviour in war, without thereby impugning the characters of those who had engaged in it<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Headway, v.13, n.8, Aug. 1931, p.159

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> A writer in the Manchester Guardian (11 Nov. 1930) believed, with some justification, that the anti-romantic books of the late twenties and early thirties were not as severe a condemnation of military service as they seemed: the recent 'remarkable output' of war literature did not 'romanticise war in the old sense' and recorded its horror, but 'there is a curious kind of admiration for war in them as well', as if it were 'an experience not to be missed'.

## 2. Naming

An important part of the imagery of many memorials is a list of names of the people commemorated. In large urban communities the addition of names to a monument might be ruled out by the number required and the cost. Even then, the names of the dead would be recorded somewhere, probably in a roll of honour in book form especially commissioned by the municipality or the war memorial committee. The names of the dead were invested with a transcendental importance. Memorials frequently carried the assertion 'Their name liveth for evermore', or the commandment 'Let those who come after see to it that their names are not forgotten'. The sanctity of their names was enhanced, in many cases, by banishing from memorials the names of others who might traditionally have expected to be mentioned. Mayors, committee members, town clerks, architects, and building contractors, had, in the past, commonly been named on monuments for which they were responsible. This was not frequently done on memorials of the First World War.

It was still acceptable for sculptors and architects discreetly sign their work but many deliberately did not. The names of donors and organisers of memorials rarely appeared. We have seen that W.H.Wood refused to add either his own name, as architect, or the local vicar's, to the inscription on a village memorial cross which he had designed, and that Walter Brierley, at the prompting of a committee member, wrote to Pudsey memorial committee, to dissuade it from putting the mayor's name on the memorial. He insisted to the town clerk that 'it is not usual to inscribe any names except those who died'<sup>36</sup>. The question took some time to settle, presumably due to resistance from old fashioned members of the committee. Five months later,

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<sup>36</sup> York, Acc.56:50, letter to A.E.Evans, 29 June 1920



there was still 'some expression of dissatisfaction prevalent about putting any name on the monument other than those it is intended to memorialize whose lives were sacrificed in the war',<sup>37</sup>. The Swansea branch of the British Legion persuaded the local authority to 'remove from the Cenotaph bronze tablets bearing the names of the living',<sup>38</sup>. At Bradford an ex-sergeant of the Pals wrote to the press, during a controversy over the city memorial, that, if any modification took place, it should be to add the names of the dead in place of the name of 'one of our "city fathers"...let it be a cenotaph to the fallen and not to any one living person',<sup>39</sup>.

While the sanctification of their names appeared to elevate the dead over the living, this way of commemorating them also celebrated their ordinariness. If we examine the growth in the practice of naming ordinary military personnel on public monuments, we can see that it occurred in recognition not of service beyond the call of duty, but rather of faithful performance of an allotted role. One's normal military duty, if executed without flinching and regardless of the consequences to oneself, could become the height of heroism. Ordinary soldiers were increasingly being honoured for just doing what they were supposed to do. This practice had the same meaning as the insistence in speeches like General Smyth's at Poplar<sup>40</sup> that the dead were honoured 'not so much for what they did as for what they were'. There was an element of realism in it, because, for many, their deaths were all that was known of their military activities.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. letter 14 Oct. 1920

<sup>38</sup> See chapter 4, note 36, p.141

<sup>39</sup> Leeds Mercury, 19 Sept. 1928. The controversy is discussed in detail below; see chapter 8, pp.302-303, and chapter 9, pp.328-330

<sup>40</sup> See p.240

In Britain, this practice of honouring ordinary people for simply performing their allotted role to its uttermost conclusion, arose as an essentially military, not civilian, convention. Monuments which publicly displayed the names of the servicemen killed in the various wars of the nineteenth century had been largely the responsibility of the services themselves, not of civilian authorities or voluntary organisations. Nicholas Penny has pointed out that the idea of naming dead soldiers of all ranks was considered first in France in the earliest revolutionary years, in order to identify the dead as full citizens of the revolutionary state. It was rapidly adopted by others for their own purposes, for example, by the Prussian monarchy, to whom the idea of the soldier as citizen in the political sense cannot have had a strong appeal<sup>41</sup>. British political leaders, however, did not adopt the practice at that time. When such a general naming was mooted in Parliament to honour the dead of Waterloo it was turned down.

A monument to the Waterloo dead was proposed by Lord Castlereagh to the House of Commons in 1815. He moved a resolution 'for the purpose of bestowing...marks of national gratitude on the heroes who fell in the late battle'<sup>42</sup>. He seems to have envisaged naming only officers who had particularly distinguished themselves. Mr Wynn then proposed naming all ranks who had died. He argued that the prospect of posthumous honours had played an important part in encouraging officers to exemplary acts of self-sacrifice, out of a desire to emulate heroes honoured in the past. He implied, though he did not say this directly, that the same consideration would be effective with other ranks. He thought the memorial 'would thus become a proud record for

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<sup>41</sup> N.Penny, 'Amor Publicus Posuit': Monuments for the People and of the People', Burlington Magazine, v.109, n.1017, December 1987, p.794

<sup>42</sup> Parliamentary Debates, first series, v.xxi, p.1049, 29 June 1815



anyone to refer to who should inherit the name of those gallant warriors; a record which he hoped would never perish'<sup>43</sup>. Mr W.Smith agreed that 'recording the names of all who had fallen....would have the best possible effect'<sup>44</sup>. Castlereagh had himself suggested that if the dead officers could give their opinion 'nothing would be so gratifying to their feelings as to see some plan adopted which should include the commemoration of their brave soldiers, that they might also live in the gratitude of posterity, and of an admiring world'<sup>45</sup>. But whatever he meant by this, he was never persuaded that giving the names of all ranks killed was the right thing to do. Most of the people involved in commemorating the Napoleonic War felt the same way, and the publicly subscribed memorials which were erected celebrated military leaders such as Nelson, Wellington, and Sir James Hill (in a large column at Shrewsbury), not the ordinary soldier<sup>46</sup>.

There were some memorials of the 1850s, associated with the Sikh and Crimean Wars, which named all ranks of the dead. One is the Chilianwallah column standing in the grounds of Chelsea Hospital, erected in 1853, which names all the dead of a badly mismanaged battle in India. Correspondence relating to its erection shows that the memorial was subscribed for by the officers of the regiment involved, but gives no clue to their motive<sup>47</sup>. In the British military cemeteries in the Crimea, many unit memorials do name all ranks, although many also do not, giving only officers'

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.1052

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.1054

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.1051

<sup>46</sup> A.Yarrington, The Commemoration of the Hero, passim.

<sup>47</sup> Public Record Office, WORK 20.30

names and perhaps simply the number of dead other rankers<sup>48</sup>. It thus appears that the practice of commemorating all dead ordinary soldiers by name was first adopted on memorials initiated and paid for by the military themselves. Only later did it spread to civic commemorative organisations. It was not the result of increased awareness on the part of civic leaders that soldiers were members of the communities they led. It was not initially, in this country, a celebration of soldiers as citizens.

Even if commemoration of other ranks killed in battle was intended principally to improve military morale, as Wynn and Smith had argued, it had another significance as well. It served to confer an enhanced status on the ordinary men as members of the military community. The officers who erected the Chilianwallah memorial saw to it that the dead were commemorated all and sundry, not just their brother officers or those men who had achieved special distinction and so stood out from the mass. Within the regimental community, and without contradicting its hierarchy (officers and men are grouped on different faces of the monument) all the members who had lost their lives were acknowledged to be worthy of personal attention. All shared a common place of honour as individuals specified by name. What made them worthy of honour was not class, leading role or exceptional performance. It was simply that they had done the duty incumbent upon them as soldiers, as members of the military community which now commemorated them. Naming them was a recognition that the dead had all been equally valuable members of that community, because they had performed their allotted tasks to the extremity of death, even though they

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<sup>48</sup> A large number of the inscriptions in these cemeteries is given in Captains J.Colborne and F.Braine, The Last of the Brave, London 1857



were not equal in any formal sense<sup>49</sup>. Honour did not depend on achieving special renown as an individual. Fidelity and reliability as a member of one's community became the essence of heroism, virtues which were within the reach of all.

After the Boer War, local military memorials were widely subscribed to by the general public. By then it had also become normal to name all ranks of the dead, and women were included. Two nurses were named on the Yorkshire county memorial at York, unveiled in 1905<sup>50</sup>. The Boer War had required the raising of some 200,000 recruits, many of whom joined volunteer units especially formed for that war<sup>51</sup>. In this respect the army serving in South Africa had a certain amount in common with the volunteers who provided the idealised soldier of the Great War.

A new development following the First World War was the frequent omission of the military ranks of the people commemorated, or at least the listing of all names in alphabetical rather than rank order, if ranks were given. This was taken to connote 'equality of sacrifice', the idea that all those who had sacrificed their lives possessed an

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<sup>49</sup> Olive Anderson has noted a new concern for the individual souls of the soldiery in the religious evangelisation of the army which followed the Crimean War. During that war the British army was first hailed as a people's army. From the 1850s the army was represented increasingly as a respectable career, and in the 1860s, in pursuit of a better quality of recruit, there was an effort to make army life comparable to that of the 'respectable' working classes, especially in its spiritual aspect. A heightened respect for the individuality of soldiers who died in the performance of the duties which devolved on them as ordinary members of their community - their regiment - would have been consistent with this trend. (O.Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in mid-Victorian Britain, English Historical Review, v.86, January 1971, pp.46-72)

<sup>50</sup> Yorkshire Herald, 3 Aug. 1905

<sup>51</sup> See chapter 2, p.64



equality of moral achievement which transcended any other distinctions, especially distinctions of class or rank. Walter Brierley advised Pudsey war memorial committee that 'we think it will be wise to adhere to the more usual custom of inscribing the name only, without either rank or regiment, and thus admitting equality of sacrifice'<sup>52</sup>.

Equality of sacrifice was an important matter of commemorative etiquette. It emerged as an especially significant principle in 1919 and 1920, when the House of Commons held debates on the designs for military cemeteries to be built abroad by the Imperial War Graves Commission. These designs, which incorporated a standard model of headstone for all graves, were opposed by a largely high-church movement, led by Robert and Hugh Cecil and Viscount Wolmer, in favour of the right of relatives to choose individual monuments for their dead<sup>53</sup>. Supporters of the

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<sup>52</sup> York, Acc 56, Box 50, letter to A.E.Evans, 29 June 1920

<sup>53</sup> Differences of religious outlook played an important, though unacknowledged, part in the controversy. Hugh Cecil argued that the bereaved should have liberty of choice in the form of monument placed above a grave (not merely in the symbol incised on a standard headstone, and in the inscription, which was the Commission's proposal). He also wanted memorials to the dead to be explicit assertions of Christian faith. In a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury he criticised the standard cross placed in war cemeteries by the Imperial War Graves Commission for lacking any Christian text. Sir Frederick Kenyon, chairman of the Commission's advisory committee on the design of the cemeteries, had told him that the cross symbolised the dedication of the dead soldiers to Christ, but Cecil felt that 'lacking any text I hardly think the Cross expresses all this naturally'.

In spite of his libertarian argument in the Commons in favour of freedom of choice for the bereaved, Cecil was far from being liberal-minded in such matters. He condemned the designs for memorials to Muslim and Hindu soldiers which the Commission was to build in France for following the funerary traditions of those two faiths. He thought it 'absurd and offensive that places of worship appropriate to the Mohammedan and Hindoo religion should be set up in Northern France. ...Christians cannot be asked to further the actual practice of the worship of such religions'. He was clearly out of sympathy with the religious pluralism which was characteristic



Imperial War Graves Commissions's designs won the debate largely by maintaining the importance of equality of sacrifice. Burdett Coutts, MP for Westminster, who was their most effective spokesman, argued that the Commission proposal gave a moral meaning to the commemoration of the dead which would be absent from a unorganised cemetery in which monuments of different sorts and sizes distinguished the dead according to the ability of their nearest and dearest to pay for a tomb. A unified design for the cemeteries, using standard components, would assert that all were equally worthy of honour, 'great and lowly, peer and peasant, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, raised to one supreme level in death by common sacrifice for a common cause',<sup>54</sup>.

### 3.The Desire to Moralise

Why should people have found the morally sanitised portrait of the dead given in commemoration credible or have wished to sustain it? There are three identifiable groups to whom it might have had a special appeal: the bereaved, ex-service men and women, and those who had not taken the risks of military service themselves but had encouraged others to do so.

To the bereaved, moralisation of the dead might make sense of deaths which could not be absorbed into the normal cycle

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of the commemoration of the war dead. (Lambeth Palace Library, Davidson Papers, v.377, ff.267 and 268, 12 Feb. 1920.) There is a letter from E.R.Lindsay expressing similar sentiments: 'Christians ought not to be deprived of their rights either through concession to heathen sentiment or through fear of democratic tyranny' (ibid., f.263, 18 Feb. 1919).

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in P.Longworth, The Unending Vigil: A history of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission 1917-1984, London 1985, p.53

of life and its satisfactions. The war dead had not lived out their allotted span. They had not been allowed to make of their lives whatever they could, and the bereaved could not console themselves that those they had lost had either led worthy and enjoyable lives, or were well out of bad ones. An alternative was to insist that they had died in a worthy cause, had contributed significantly to it in the process, and had even been given an opportunity for achievement which a life of peace might never have offered. For most of them, no record of any significant military act survived apart from their joining up and their dying; hence the moral strength willingly to serve and courageously to face death were the only constructive achievements that could be attributed generally to them.

The ex-service personnel who became members of the British Legion took a special interest in ensuring that the dead were properly honoured. They contributed to the erection of local war memorials. Local branches conducted their own remembrance ceremonies. A national ceremony was held at the Cenotaph each Whitsun to coincide with the Legion's annual conference. Members paraded at the public Armistice Day ceremonies and sold poppies in aid of disabled ex-servicemen. These veterans were presented with a number of challenges to their self-esteem after the war. Philip Gibbs recounted the brutalising effect which he thought hand-to-hand combat had on those who participated in it<sup>55</sup>. Official enquiries suggested that trench warfare could have an injurious psychological impact even on those who did not develop symptoms needing treatment. The psychological health of all who had fought was thus publicly questioned<sup>56</sup>. Against this, the moral example of the dead

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<sup>55</sup> See pp.246-247

<sup>56</sup> E.Leed, No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I, Cambridge 1979, p. 181. See also T.Bogacz, 'War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-1922: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into "Shell Shock"', Journal of



provided an elevated public image of the virtues of military service and of those who performed it. Fidelity to the dead as moral exemplars could help ex-service personnel reaffirm a sense of their own moral worth, and give them a reason for looking back on their service with pride and a sense of achievement which was not dulled by the widespread sense of horror at the destruction and destabilisation the war had caused. It might even help them to come to terms with things they themselves had done in the war by laying a moral cloak over them.

However, the Legion's commitment to commemoration cannot be taken as representative of the feelings of veterans in general. It managed to recruit only about one tenth of those who had served in the armed forces during the war, and its membership included a large number of women who had not shared the experience of frontline fighting. Female membership rose from 6560 in 1922 to 107,580 (slightly over a quarter of the total) in 1930<sup>57</sup>. Moreover, some ex-soldiers clearly felt no need to moralise their past in this way. The writer Charles Carrington, who had fought in the trenches, did not wish to mourn. He would not go to the Cenotaph ceremonies because he disliked what he saw as their pacifist message, and complained that 'the British Legion seemed to make its principal outing a day of mourning', and the ceremony at the Cenotaph became 'too much like attending one's own funeral'<sup>58</sup>. He confined himself to celebrating 11 November with like-minded friends. Carrington seems to have enjoyed the war. His outlook at its end may be inferred from the fact that he considered volunteering for the Auxiliary forces fighting against Irish independence, and for the British counter-revolutionary intervention force

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Contemporary History, v.24, n.2, Apr. 1989, pp.227-256

<sup>57</sup> G.Wootton, Official History, p.305

<sup>58</sup> C.Carrington, Soldier from the Wars Returning, London 1964, p.258

in Russia<sup>59</sup>. Those who joined the Legion helped to keep up the pressure it exerted to sustain the commemoration of the dead in its established form, but this tells us little about those who did not join. They may have acquiesced in commemoration in its current form, or refused to take part. I shall return to the Legion's reasons for encouraging and defending commemoration in chapter 9.

The people who recruited, in many cases economically or morally blackmailed, and finally conscripted men into the forces may have had a special interest in representing the dead as entirely willing volunteers. For the one thing which was not acknowledged, even amongst talk of the horrors of combat, and of the brutalisation it may have caused in otherwise peaceful men, was that the honoured dead had been psychologically pressured or legally compelled to become the victims of war. Success in recruiting and in the administration of conscription had been matters of considerable pride to local social leaders during the war<sup>60</sup>, but they did not claim conspicuous credit for it afterwards.

Many men had joined the forces only reluctantly. 1,349,854 men were conscripted under the Military Service Acts passed in 1916 and 1918<sup>61</sup>. The voluntary system of enlistment which had existed before the passage of these acts had also exerted a good deal of moral pressure on reluctant individuals through newspapers, the church, employers and voluntary organisations which committed themselves to assisting recruitment. Employees were sometimes offered financial inducements to enlist, or, on the other hand,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p.252

<sup>60</sup> J.M.Osborne, The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain, 1914-1916, New York 1982, pp.59 and 64-72

<sup>61</sup> J.Terraine, Impacts of War, 1914 and 1918, London 1970, p.114



dismissed from their jobs to force them into the services<sup>62</sup>.

There is some indirect evidence that activity in this field came back to haunt those who conducted it. The headmaster of a Sussex school wrote a few days after the Armistice:

I can see so many of my old boys who are dead or wounded...and recall them as boys at school where I used to urge on them the duty of patriotism, so that at present, it doesn't seem right that those who have escaped should give themselves up to Joy days...there is an almost universal feeling throughout the country that Honour shall be rendered to the dead and sympathy shown to the bereaved...<sup>63</sup>

Francis Dod, the Stoke Newington alderman, also offers evidence of this. As he did not always choose his words very carefully, he might be expected occasionally to say what others in his position would not, and in a speech to a public dinner in 1920, he expressed a fear that his role as a recruiter could have been resented. Some months before, he said, he had addressed a meeting of ex-servicemen, many of whom 'had been sent into the army by me, and when that vast body stood up and sang "For he's a jolly good fellow" - meaning me - I thought they did not misunderstand me',<sup>64</sup>. Military leaders, who had such a large part in honouring the moral achievements of the men who died in the operations they devised, had cause to feel a similar anxiety.

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<sup>62</sup> Accounts of these methods can be found in C.Hughes, 'The New Armies', in I.Beckett and K.Simpson, A Nation in Arms: A Social History of the British Army in the First World War, Manchester 1985, p.102, and J.M.Osborne The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain, pp.24-28

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in P.Horn, Rural Life, p.206

<sup>64</sup> Hackney and Stoke Newington Recorder, 12 Nov. 1920

Moralising the memory of the dead thus suited the requirements of three of the principal groups involved in erecting war memorials: civic leaders, ex-service organisations and the bereaved. Their requirements may have had different origins, but nonetheless created a common purpose in their commitment to ensuring that the dead were publicly honoured and their moral reputation preserved.

#### 4. Sources for the Image of the Dead

Just as the forms of memorial and ceremony adopted for the commemoration of the dead had their sources in earlier practices of civic commemoration, so the ethical ideas enshrined in remembrance drew on already recognised values. The ideal of self-sacrificing service had roots in the nineteenth century. Writers concerned with the morality of public conduct already valued the ideal of self-sacrifice for a cause, or in support of other individuals, in the 1860s and 70s, as part of a code of disinterested service to the community. The kind of service in question was the provision of moral leadership or example to the increasingly large proportion of the population who could make their interests felt in politics in late Victorian Britain. Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, amongst others, had offered commitment to disinterested service as an ennobling exercise to young middle-class idealists, in order to provide the moral resources they would need to lead the nation in a democratic age which was dispensing with the leadership of an hereditary aristocracy<sup>65</sup>. At this period the ideal of self-sacrifice through service remained strongly connected to the archetype of an heroic Christian aristocracy, but the example of ancient Greek and Roman

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<sup>65</sup> W.E.Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870, New Haven 1957, pp.281-7, discusses self-sacrifice as a constituent element in the ideal of 'nobility'.



civic virtue was also acknowledged, especially by J.S.Mill<sup>66</sup>.

The educated and privileged of late Victorian society could express their sense of social duty and moral awareness in a mixture of missionary and social work amongst the urban poor through philanthropic activity. One of the most idealistic and optimistic embodiments of this impulse was the settlement movement which flourished in east London and some other cities in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Young men from Oxford and Cambridge universities went to live amongst the urban slums in settlement houses with various denominational affiliations. Many members of the generation which had participated in the settlement movement, like Bishop Winnington-Ingram of London, a former head of the Oxford House settlement in east London, or who had shared its ideals, later took a leading part in establishing the ideas and conventions for the commemoration of the Great War dead.

Military service, and especially death, were also represented as virtuous sacrifice by advocates of compulsory national service in the period leading up to the Great War. The National Service League, founded in 1901 to campaign for universal, though rather limited, military service, argued that this would be as useful in sharpening the individual's sense of citizenship and improving personal discipline, as it would in increasing national military preparedness<sup>67</sup>. A leaflet published by the League in 1903 described service in war as an act of Christian self-sacrifice:

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.284

<sup>67</sup> See A.Summers, 'Militarism in Britain before the Great War', History Workshop 2, 1976, pp.104-123

War is not murder, as some fancy; war is sacrifice. The fighting and killing are not the essence of it, but are the accidents, though the inseparable accidents; and even these, in the wide modern fields where a soldier rarely in his own sight sheds any blood but his own, where he lies on the battle sward not to inflict death but to endure it - even these are mainly purged of savagery and transfigured into devotion. War is not murder but sacrifice, which is the soul of Christianity<sup>68</sup>.

For the late Victorians and Edwardians, service and sacrifice had been not merely an expression of concern for others, especially the poor, but a means of spiritual renewal for those who undertook it. They were intended to contribute to a search for meaning or faith, as much as to address practical problems. In 1896 W. Moore Ede, writing of the settlement movement's efforts to convert the London poor, said that the missionaries 'will be themselves converted, for they will have turned to Christ and accepted His yoke of personal service'<sup>69</sup>. The First World War created its own serious problems of meaning - death and suffering on one hand, political and social change on the other. The sufferings of the war and the problems of meaning and readjustment they brought with them had impinged on all classes. Through the commemoration of the war dead, religious and civic leaders who had been brought up with the ideal of self-sacrificing service offered a reconstructed version of it to the whole nation, as a way in which ordinary men and women might confront the problems and

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<sup>68</sup> Canon J.H. Skrine, National Service League Leaflet L, 1903, quoted in *ibid.*, p.120

<sup>69</sup> W. Moore Ede, The Attitude of the Church to Some of the Social Problems of Town Life, 1896, quoted in K.S. Inglis, The Church and the Working Classes in Victorian England, London 1963, p.143



losses of war through a combination of personal and public moral renewal.

Many of the ideas and values subsequently applied to the memory of the dead had been put to work extensively in wartime propaganda. The most important of these for the post-war cult of the dead was a tendency to use the imagery of Christian martyrdom to represent the war as a purgative moral struggle, and participation in it as a personal moral triumph for the individuals involved. Self-sacrifice in the war was identified with Christ's sacrifice. The Bishop of London was characteristically explicit about it. He said in 1916 that the blood of the dead 'mingles with the Precious Blood which flowed in Calvary; again the world is being redeemed by precious blood'<sup>70</sup>. At the unveiling of three street shrines in the Preston Road estate, Poplar, he said: 'This nation had never done a more Christlike thing than when it went to war in 1914'<sup>71</sup>.

The idea that war was a force for the renewal of society, and that self-sacrifice was a supreme value and a good in itself were also present in the secular patriotic rhetoric of the war effort. Lloyd George invoked them in a speech in September 1914, saying:

the stern hand of Fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the everlasting things that matter for a nation - the high peaks we had forgotten, of Honour, Duty, Patriotism, and clad in glittering white, the great pinnacle of Sacrifice, pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven. We shall descend into the valleys again; but as long as the men and women of this generation last, they will carry in their hearts the

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted in A. Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.190

<sup>71</sup> Tower Hamlets Local Studies Library, untitled press cutting, 23 Dec. 1916

image of those great mountain peaks whose foundations are not shaken, though Europe rock and sway in the convulsions of a great war<sup>72</sup>.

It became a commonplace that the war was having a positive moral impact through the opportunity it provided to rise above the mundane concerns of peacetime life, and through the suffering which it inflicted (though by no means everyone agreed<sup>73</sup>). Proponents of this view believed that there was a spiritually constructive side to the war which would restore the nation or the world to a state of moral health. A writer in the London County Council Staff Gazette expressed the opinion that as a result of the war, 'crude materialism' and 'uninspired spiritualism' had 'given place to larger thoughts', and that 'class distinctions and old political boundaries have been removed'<sup>74</sup>. The Bishop of Carlisle, more dramatically, regarded the war as 'the agony in the womb of the morning; of a new birth of mankind to a life of higher truth and nobler liberty'<sup>75</sup>. Some of those, like the poet Rupert Brooke, who joined the armed forces also saw the war as a cleansing and renewing experience. Gilbert Talbot, son of the Bishop of Winchester, who was killed in action in 1915, wrote to his parents, 'Its all magnificent really - its purging us all'<sup>76</sup>. It was through self-sacrifice, through willingly accepting the need to

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in A.Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.29

<sup>73</sup> Lord Hugh Cecil expressed his scepticism in a sermon at Saint Martin in The Fields, London, in November 1916 (Church Family Newspaper, 24 Nov. 1916), and the writer Caroline Playne thought the war debased the sensibilities of the public (A.Wilkinson, The Church of England, pp.170 and 190).

<sup>74</sup> J.G.Arrow in LCC Staff Gazette, v.17, Feb. 1916, p.22

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in A.Marrin, The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War, Durham, North Carolina, 1974, p.212

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in A.Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.186



suffer, that these desirable transformations could be brought about.

The ideals of self-sacrifice and purgation were intended to add to the moral acceptability of the war, and also give meaning to its unexpected destructiveness and the suffering it caused. Although certain branches of the newspaper press were complacent and unrealistically optimistic in their accounts of the war on many occasions, the public became aware that the war was enormously destructive and that soldiers' experiences were often profoundly dreadful. There was a widespread sense of the war's horror even amongst those who were not, or not yet, the victims of it, either personally or through the loss of loved ones<sup>77</sup>. The idea that war was a form of moral service and entailed martyrdom for a great ideal provided a way of making sense of suffering and actual or threatened loss in such a context. It was taken up by sensitive and anxious private individuals as well as by recruiters and propagandists. In her diary for 1915 Vera Brittain wrote of 'our present life - its agony & absence of ornamentation - its bareness of all but the few great things which are all we have to cling to now - honour & love and heroism & sacrifice'<sup>78</sup>.

The other key quality attributed to the dead - comradeship - derived partly from official military emphasis on *esprit de corps*, and appeared in recruiting propaganda from an early stage in the war. In a pamphlet first published in 1914, Kipling described the war service of volunteers as an 'all-embracing brotherhood' and asked what would become of 'the young man who has deliberately elected to outcast himself'

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, the personal correspondence of the Essex schoolmaster, Robert Saunders, quoted in T. Wilson, The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War 1914-1918, Cambridge 1986 pp.166-7; Vera Brittain's diary frequently gives the same impression.

<sup>78</sup> A. Bishop (ed), Chronicle of Youth, Vera Brittain's War Diary, 1913-1917, London 1981, p.202, entry for 26 May 1915

from it<sup>79</sup>. The comradeship which was being cultivated through the war effort, like self-sacrifice, was seen as a redeeming virtue achieved through suffering. In a letter to The Times early in 1917, a retired bishop wrote: 'The trenches have made fellowship and brotherhood a reality in danger and hardship and sacrifice'. It was 'a principle which, like all things worth getting, has been begotten in travail'<sup>80</sup>.

Comradeship was also an important aspect of the personal experiences of soldiers. Tony Ashworth has described the importance to soldiers of 'small, informal friendship cliques which provided for their members emotional and material welfare not forthcoming from the military organisation'<sup>81</sup>. Denis Winter, too, notes that a circle of 'mates' provided 'the chief prop' against cracking under the strain of combat<sup>82</sup>. This system of support encouraged a sense of mutual appreciation and esteem which in itself could be seen as valuable. 'Comradeship redeemed war from absolute condemnation even where combatants were extremely critical', Ashworth has written. He gives the example of an officer who 'hated the war intensely' but who admired his brother officers and was proud of his company and regiment<sup>83</sup>.

The idea that the dead were special also had a sociological source. Those who enlisted earliest in the war appeared to

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<sup>79</sup> Quoted in P.Buitenhuys, The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda 1914-1918 and After, London 1989, p.26

<sup>80</sup> Times, 12 Jan. 1917

<sup>81</sup> T.Ashworth, Trench Warfare 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System, London 1980, p.155

<sup>82</sup> D.Winter, Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War, London 1978, p.137

<sup>83</sup> T.Ashworth, Trench Warfare, p.156



be the most willing to serve the country. They had shown the readiest appreciation of their duty, and the greatest generosity. The standards of physical fitness required of enlisted men were also higher at the beginning of the war, and were progressively reduced as the war continued. Those who enlisted early were the most likely to be killed, and as casualties mounted, so did anxiety that the human stock of the nation was being eroded - the morally and physically healthy part of the nation being drained away. Thus an assumption could grow that the best were those who had been killed.

Finally, wartime usage provided a precedent for the exhortations given in commemoration of the dead to moderate the feeling of grief or to transform it into something else. Bishop Cecil of Exeter, in 1915, tried to represent the loss of a loved one as a moral achievement in itself. He said 'let us doff our hats to the parents of the brave dead, and offer them our congratulations',<sup>84</sup>. Some soldiers, too, adopted this outlook. A letter from one to his parents before the opening of the Battle of the Somme asked them, if he was killed, to 'look upon it as an honour that you have given your son for King and Country',<sup>85</sup>. General Currie, the Canadian commander, told his men: 'Your mothers will not lament your fate, but will be proud to have borne such sons',<sup>86</sup>. When the war shrine which Charles Higham had presented to Islington was unveiled, the donor said that he hoped 'people would approach that spot not in a spirit of lamentation but of hope'. He thought that if the dead could be asked they would say their loss should be born 'with courage and fortitude',<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> A.Marrin, The Last Crusade, p.213

<sup>85</sup> J.Laffin (ed), Letters from the Front: 1914-1918, 1973, p.6, quoted in A.Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.189

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in A.Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.187

<sup>87</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 28 Oct. 1918

Such precedents offered organisers, artists and other participants in the commemoration of the dead a number of key ideas which directed their activity. These ideas had come to prominence, along with street shrines and remembrance ceremonies, in what was said during the war about suffering and death. Subsequently they provided the basic common assumptions on which the co-operation necessary in war memorial projects depended. They also provided a common understanding and sense of shared purpose between war memorial committees and the artists they employed. Artists were trusted to give expression to by now familiar values without having to be told what to express. They were experts who could be relied on to say the things everyone knew must be said. They could satisfy their clients in this role because they already shared their expectations and sense of propriety. Everyone involved had been subjected to four years of intense effort to represent death in the war as a moral achievement, and many of them had assisted actively in the effort.

The common assumptions thus provided for commemoration were not closely defined, and allowed considerable room for interpretation. People referred to these fundamental premisses about the dead when they discussed in more detail what they believed the significance of the war to be, what lessons should be drawn from it, and how the survivors should behave. Views on these matters often conflicted, and the conflict gave rise to differing trends within commemorative thought and action which will be examined in the next chapter.



Chapter 8  
Moral Obligation and Politics  
in the Commemoration of the Dead

Many people expected the commemoration of the dead to have a beneficial effect on the behaviour of the living. To do adequate honour to the dead it was necessary to understand what they had died for and to follow the example they had set. The dead had died for others, and by emulating them, the living could show that they were, indeed, worthy of the sacrifices the dead had made on their behalf. The vicar of Enfield told the audience at a remembrance ceremony in October 1919 that they could only 'do worthy homage' to the qualities shown by the dead if they applied the same 'vision and hope and faith' to opposing 'all manner of evil in all places in the world'<sup>1</sup>. 'They could never be the same', said the Bishop of Stepney in 1920, at Saint Matthias, Stoke Newington, 'when they thought of their dead, who had taught them the lesson of doing God's will'<sup>2</sup>. The inscription on Cheltenham war memorial concludes:

Learn from them so to live and die that, when you have followed them and are no more seen, you may like them be remembered and regretted.

The requirement to emulate the dead was given added force by fear that their sacrifices might otherwise prove to have been in vain. If the dead were remembered, and their example of virtuous conduct was followed, then it would be possible to ensure that they had died to some purpose. Some people did express the fear that all the suffering had been in vain because the world was not a whit improved after the war. The Bishop of London referred to this when unveiling a

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<sup>1</sup> Enfield Gazette, 11 Oct. 1919

<sup>2</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/25, untitled press cutting, 18 Oct. 1920

parish church war memorial in October 1920. He quoted a letter from an officers's widow who had written, 'I would not mind if I saw a better world, but I feel that my husband died in vain. That is the cause of my bitterness'<sup>3</sup>. The Bishop's answer was that only the future could show whether or not it had all been a waste of life. He added significantly that whether or not the future finally did give retrospective meaning to the war deaths 'would...largely depend upon what the people in that church did to make the sacrifice worth while'. At the unveiling in 1921 of the village memorial at Brancepeth in County Durham, Hugh Bowes, a Territorial colonel and a leading local citizen, told the congregation that the dead had died 'for a definite purpose' - the defence of the British birthright of liberty - and that those who remained should 'see by their action, ...that the sacrifice had not been wasted'<sup>4</sup>.

The dead were judges as well as examples. 'Corporal 1435' wrote in the Morning Post, in 1933, that survivors like himself remembered the dead 'with mingled feelings' - sorrow, pride and humility. Sorrow because 'the gap left by their death seems to increase; pride because we were privileged to be their comrades in this their greatest adventure, and humility because we realise how utterly we fail to live up to the example which they have set us'<sup>5</sup>. If the living can 'retain that spirit' - the suppression of self-interest, devotion to duty, sincerity, loyalty - they would, at the last 'face them in full confidence that we have tried to justify our survival by our imitation of them'.

The living thus had an obligation to emulate the dead, in order both to show that they were worthy of the sacrifices

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<sup>3</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/25, untitled press cutting 15 Oct. 1920

<sup>4</sup> Durham County Advertiser, 10 June 1921

<sup>5</sup> Morning Post, 13 Nov. 1933



the dead had made for them, and to give continuing meaning to their deaths. This chapter will examine the various inflections which were given to the idea of an obligation to the dead, and the political uses to which they were put<sup>6</sup>. Because commemoration emphasised the moral rather than the military aspects of war death, the example of the dead was seen as a universal moral one, not specifically related to military issues. At the same time, the emphasis placed on their comradeship directed attention towards the moral aspect of collective relationships, in the form of loyalty and service to one's community. As a result, the obligation to emulate the dead was frequently discussed in terms of the individual's responsibility to the community.

### 1. War and Citizenship

Effective emulation required the living to understand and interpret the wishes and ideals of the dead, and to act accordingly. Consequently, a large part of the speech and

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<sup>6</sup> As a rhetorical device, the appeal to give retrospective meaning to death in war by following some course of political or moral action was not new, although the scale of the World War, and the impact of its losses on a large proportion of the population, increased the number of people who might have been susceptible to it. Similar appeals had accompanied commemoration of the Boer War dead. Speaking at the unveiling of the Yorkshire Boer War memorial in 1905, Lord Wenlock had said that, though many people wanted to forget the war in South Africa, it was important to remember it as 'an incentive and a stimulus to determine that never again would they be compelled to undergo such a trial'. He meant that the difficulties and unpreparedness of the army in that war ought not to be repeated. 'If that were the outcome,' he went on, 'those men whose memory they were there to commemorate would not have died in vain'. (Yorkshire Herald, 3 Aug. 1905)

In the general election of 1900, Lloyd George, who had been campaigning against the Boer War, was opposed at Carnarfon by a Conservative who included in his manifesto a promise that he would 'not allow the Blood and Treasure spent in the South African War to be sacrificed in vain'. (J. Grigg, The Young Lloyd George, London 1973, p.270)

writing which accompanied the ceremonial acts and symbolic objects of commemoration consisted of attempts to interpret those wishes and ideals and apply them to the post-war world. Interpretations took the form of political homilies reflecting on the state of the nation, and on how the work of the dead could be furthered by those who survived them.

At the unveiling ceremony of the war memorial tablet at Rowntree's chocolate factory in York in September 1920, Mr. Horner, a local schoolmaster, urged his audience to work for a future of peace and social reform, following the Rowntree tradition, but basing his appeal on a sense of obligation to the dead:

I would ask you to take this thought away - we shall be false to the dead unless we live and fight for that cause in which they fought and died. In dedicating this tablet to their memory let us also dedicate our lives to the ideal in whose quest they met their death. "Let us believe," with Edward Carpenter, "that Love, not Hatred, is the power by which in the end the world will be saved"; and let us pray that a heroism equal to that shown in the cause of destruction may urge us in future to a great and glorious constructive era in social life<sup>1</sup>.

Industrial relations were discussed in a similar vein. At the unveiling of the London and North Western Railway memorial at Euston station in October 1921, Charles Lawrence, the company chairman, said that

we, the survivors, should dedicate ourselves anew to the service of our country, and that, especially in our characters of employers and employed, we should strive to act in a spirit of mutual sympathy, of mutual

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<sup>1</sup> The Cocoa Works Magazine, new series, v.1, n.6, Oct. 1920, p.128



forbearance, of absolute rectitude of purpose, and even of magnanimity if we wish to assist in binding up the wounds of our common country, and so prove ourselves worthy of the sacrifice these men have made for us<sup>8</sup>.

The example of comradeship set by the dead was seen as essential to solving whatever problems the future might hold for the nation. Unveiling Leeds war memorial, in 1922, Lord Lascelles (a major in the Guards) was reported as saying

the individual part in the war was a very minute one, but the collective part was vital and of the greatest. He predicted that the spirit of comradeship which they had fostered, or tried to foster, could not fail to leave its mark on the life of the nation. The best memorial of the illustrious dead would be to continue that spirit of comradeship which they so firmly loved, and which by their death they had made immortal<sup>9</sup>.

The Duke of York, unveiling Saint Michael's war memorial, Poplar, in 1920, said, 'If we can do our duty with the same unselfish comradeship with which these splendid dead did their task, there can be nothing dark in the difficulties which the future may hold for our country',<sup>10</sup>.

Speakers and writers laid emphasis on the individual's place in the community or nation, in other words on his or her 'citizenship'. The memory of the dead would be treasured as ideal citizens, the Enfield Gazette maintained in 1919: 'Being dead, they will speak for all time to future generations, a perpetual reminder of, and incentive to, that Duty to the State which is the reasonable service to be

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<sup>8</sup> Public Record Office, RAIL 236/418/1, draft of speech

<sup>9</sup> Yorkshire Weekly Post, 21 Oct. 1922

<sup>10</sup> East End News, 10 Dec. 1920

rendered by each and every citizen'<sup>11</sup>. It was by being a good citizen that one could best emulate the dead. The Archbishop of York told railwaymen at a commemorative service in Stockport, in 1919, that they should repay their debt to the dead 'by filling their citizenship with a new spirit worthy of that with which these men met their death'<sup>12</sup>.

Frequent prayers were offered that the living might be worthy of those they were commemorating. One such prayer elaborated thus on the theme of citizenship:

Almighty God who hast made us citizens of this realm, enable us to be worthy of those who have died for us. Grant us with willing spirit to do whatever duty may be laid upon us; with gladness to make all sacrifices to which we may be called; and in undaunted faith to hold fast that which is right and true with courage and good cheer; that whether by patience or by service we may take our part with our brethren in every hour of our country's need;...<sup>13</sup>

Citizenship was a subject of considerable concern to educationalists and to many voluntary organisations concerned with social improvement in the inter-war years. The idea of good citizenship was promoted through the teaching of Civics. E.M.White, an LCC lecturer in Civics, reviewing the available textbooks on the subject in 1923, gave a comprehensive definition which stressed continuity between generations through the emulation of past examples.

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<sup>11</sup> Enfield Gazette, 18 July 1919

<sup>12</sup> Stockport Advertiser, 1 Aug. 1919

<sup>13</sup> Lewisham Local History Centre, unveiling programme for Deptford war memorial



The citizen is the inheritor of all that we understand by civilisation. As a citizen he can utilize all the achievements of his ancestors for a foundation on which to build his own contribution to the advancement of civilisation. Modern Civics inspires him with a wish to do this, and teaches him how his ancestors did it, and how it may be continued by his own generation in preparation for those who follow him.

The scope of the subject was: 'a study...of institutions, customs and tendencies, so that the citizen may realise whence and how he has come and whither he is going'. It was now distinguished from 'the dull subject of administrative details and duties that was once supposed to cover the sphere of citizenship', and should be 'an inspiration to service. ...Modern Civics', he concluded, 'may be said to date from the war, when a quickening - not an initiation - of social questionings, suggestions, determinations and experiments took place',<sup>14</sup>.

The image of citizenship propagated through remembrance was based on aims and values taken from wartime military, rather than peacetime political experience. The ideal citizen represented by the dead was a person who gave everything for the common good, above all for the good of a local community or an institution of which he or she was a recognised member. The ideal was abstracted from the desires, complaints and sectional loyalties which go to make up normal civil life, and from the means which civilian political and administrative institutions offered for dealing with them. It offered a citizenship consisting of service and sacrifice, as distinct from rights and power.

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<sup>14</sup> E.M.White, 'The Purpose of Civics, and How it is Served in Recent English Text-Books', Sociological Review, v.15, 1923, pp.206-7

The ideal was applied to a nation in which political rights had recently been very considerably extended. The 1918 Representation of the People Act enfranchised virtually all men over the age of twenty-one and women over the age of thirty. The electorate was raised from some seven million to twenty million. With the extension of rights, new voters had acquired influence in the exercise of political power. The hold of an established civic élite on local (and indeed also on national) government was being, to some extent, loosened. In the local authority elections of April 1919, in a number of London and other boroughs or districts, Labour local councils were elected. At the same time, there was considerable anxiety about social disorder in the aftermath of war, and the economic power of employers was challenged by major strikes in the mining industry and on the railways,

Ex-servicemen were also a source of anxiety. On the left as well as the right, there was a fear that disgruntled ex-servicemen might resort to political violence<sup>15</sup>. Many ex-servicemen showed an aggressive unwillingness to put up with unsatisfactory living and working conditions, and decisions by the authorities which they thought unreasonable. At Luton, it was alleged, a refusal by the town council to allow ex-servicemen to use a park for a drumhead memorial service had led to the burning down of the town hall.<sup>16</sup>. Many ex-servicemen were now entitled to vote for the first time, and there was also some concern that they might be prepared to use their wartime training and experience against the civil authorities.

Guardians of established order met the apparent increase in political power available to people who had not previously

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<sup>15</sup> S.R.Ward, 'Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen', Historical Journal, v.16, n.1, 1973, pp.178-188; D.Englander, 'The National Union of Ex-Servicemen', p.41

<sup>16</sup> Evening News, 21 July 1919



been entitled to wield it with appeals to the idea of responsible citizenship and to the memory of the war effort. The Enfield Gazette challenged the new Labour-controlled district council to show its fitness to hold power by demonstrating 'their conception of Civics in practical administration',<sup>17</sup>. The Barnsley Chronicle, from the heart of the south Yorkshire coalfield, commented hopefully on the mining crisis:

Surely patriotism and love of country will even now prevail over the fatuous folly of heading this country - for which so many have valiantly fought and died - straight for irretrievable national disaster<sup>18</sup>.

At many a memorial unveiling, as we have seen, political, military and industrial leaders juxtaposed these two ideas to form a civic creed of remembrance. With a conscious eye on the state of the nation, they put forward an ideal of citizenship devoted to co-operation and to the service of others rather than the struggle for one's own rights and the fulfilment of one's own needs or those of the particular section of the community to which one belonged.

Although the idea of citizenship implied in commemoration was frequently invoked in defence of the social and political status quo, it was not confined to that use. We have seen that, in the example set by the dead, the ideal community member was represented as a self-sacrificing citizen. At the same time, the commemorative practice of naming the dead implied that the duty required of a citizen-soldier, and hence of his commemorators, was not the performance of exceptional acts which were beyond the scope of one's normal duties, but rather the performance of one's allotted role to its uttermost, regardless of the

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<sup>17</sup> Enfield Gazette, 11 Apr. 1919

<sup>18</sup> Barnsley Chronicle, 22 Feb. 1919

consequences to oneself. The service required of the citizen was service in his or her place. This appears, initially, to have distinctly conservative overtones. What was celebrated was differential citizenship.

However, a different interpretation was possible. If one could serve fully in one's place, whatever that might be, then all who sincerely served and made sacrifices were entitled to recognition. As commemoration amounted to a public demand that the service and sacrifice of those commemorated be recognised and valued, it became a medium through which social groups whose rights had previously been relatively limited could claim equality with those who were more privileged. They made this claim on the strength of their sacrifices in the war effort, represented by 'their' dead - people from their own social groups who had made the supreme sacrifice. A letter to the Daily Herald in November 1924 from a hiking enthusiast directed just such a claim against the rights of landowners to exclude the public from their properties. He wrote: 'throughout the kingdom memorials of stone have been erected' to the war dead. But why, he asked, were "Trespassers will be prosecuted" signs 'multiplying throughout the land' and barbed wire stretching 'for miles of the woodside? Is it to resist the encroachments of the kith and kin of those to whom the memorials of stone have been erected?',<sup>19</sup> The reference to barbed wire, in connection with the war dead, was particularly poignant, as it implied that the war being waged by landlords against the unpropertied was as monstrous as the world war had been.

We have seen that the characterisation of the dead which commemoration offered played down the element of violence in military service and transformed the wartime experience of combat into a moral achievement. As a result, the ideals

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<sup>19</sup> Daily Herald, 12 Nov. 1924, letter from A. Bond Saunders



and virtues attributed to the dead could, without difficulty, be applied to non-combatants who had in some way served or suffered - to women, to men too old or unfit for military service, even to children. The honour due to self-sacrificing service could be claimed by or on behalf of these groups, as well as the fighting men.

The sacrifices of non-combatants were duly recognised in a number of cases. The families of the dead were set alongside those they had lost. Opening the East Vale Wesleyan memorial hall at Longton, Rev. A. Woodward said that, while remembering 'the courage of those who had gone out to fight at duty's call', they also remembered 'the patient heroism of those who sent them with a sob in their hearts, but a "God bless you" on their lips'<sup>20</sup>. The Birmingham Post maintained that the city's Hall of Memory was also a memorial to 'parents and wives and children who acquiesced, un murmuring in risks and in sacrifice'<sup>21</sup>.

Women and in some cases children had suffered, served and died, and were recognised for this. Women were commemorated along with servicemen, and so the values of sacrificial service were attributed to them. At Lewes, Lilian Parker is commemorated on the war memorial (although, with two men, a late addition). The nature of her service, like that of all the men named with her, is not specified, as no ranks or units are mentioned. At Hartley Wintney, Hampshire, Emily Judd is identified as a munitions worker on a memorial which does give details of the military units of those commemorated<sup>22</sup>. Nurses were recognised as a service in

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<sup>20</sup> Staffordshire Sentinel, 19 July 1920

<sup>21</sup> Birmingham Post, 6 July 1925

<sup>22</sup> According to Colin McIntyre, women are more often listed separately on First World War memorials than integrated into the main sequence of men's names; see C. McIntyre, Monuments of War: How to read a War Memorial, London 1990, p.154. I am also grateful to Ms Catherine Moriarty of the

#### ERRATUM

p.283, line 27, ordinary infantryman. By 1918 the uniform and equipment of frontline infantry officers and men were identical, thus many of these figures can be taken to represent all servicemen, officers as much as other ranks. I am grateful to Dr John Bourne for pointing this out.



their own right. At Menston, Yorkshire, the war memorial was a cottage for a district nurse, and at its unveiling the local MP said, 'In the lives of nurses there was heroism that was never told'<sup>23</sup>. All women throughout the Empire who had been killed in the war were commemorated by the restoration of the Five Sisters Window at York Minster, a project which began as a county memorial to women. The British Legion Journal called it 'a women's cenotaph'<sup>24</sup>.

At Poplar, where 18 school children had been killed by German bombs in 1917, the victims were commemorated as the equals of dead service personnel and represented to other children as suffering comrades from whom they should learn lessons. A memorial appeal was launched the same year, in which the mayor asserted that 'These dear little ones died as truly for their country as any of our gallant men'<sup>25</sup>. When their memorial was unveiled, General Ashmore told those present, 'They died for their country and had set an example which should never be forgotten'<sup>26</sup>. Servicemen had borne the brunt of the suffering, but their achievements were shared by others to some degree. The bereaved, and non-combatants who were killed by enemy action (especially women and children, who could not be construed as legitimate military targets) were closest to, perhaps matched, the moral achievement of the dead soldiers.

Where the serving citizen of wartime was represented figuratively, the image very often used was that of an ordinary infantryman, thus showing that the service and

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Imperial War Museum's National Inventory of War Memorials for confirming this point.

<sup>23</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 29 May 1922

<sup>24</sup> British Legion Journal, v.11, n.1, July 1931, p.36

<sup>25</sup> Tower Hamlets, leaflet Nov. 1917

<sup>26</sup> East London Advertiser, 23 June 1919

sacrifice honoured was that of ordinary people in what ever places they had been called to. Social distinction, the privileges and responsibilities of leadership, special skill or success in the execution of military operations - things which would distinguish individuals from the mass of their comrades - were of less significance in commemoration than the simple and loyal performance of one's duty regardless of the cost to oneself. Distinctions of status and success had no relevance to the concept of citizen-service.

However, while the concept of citizen-service was all-inclusive, the commemorative image of it did make an important distinction amongst citizens by allowing differences of gender to appear clearly in the commemorative record. The convention of distinguishing men from women by giving women's full christian names, as against initials for men, was often used in memorial inscriptions. There was, moreover, no figure, equivalent to the infantryman, who could stand universally for female service and sacrifice. Motherhood was used to provide a limited generalisation, and we have seen that parenthood was honoured as a form of sacrificial service; but images of women's actual war service were usually specific, representing them as nurses or munitions workers, for example. No general image of serving womanhood existed, and, by definition, the image of the male who suffers for others does not refer to women who do the same.

This absence was to some extent compensated for in other ways - ways which implied a claim by women to recognition of their idealism, service and sacrifice. Many women's organisations took an active part in commemoration, and thereby enacted a living image of female service through their organised, often uniformed, presence at ceremonies, and through their work for war memorial committees. Female medical and military services, and the women's sections of the British Legion, took formal part in ceremonies, and



sometimes women's civic organisations initiated memorial projects, as at Tadcaster, Yorkshire, where they asked for Walter Brierley's advice on a design<sup>27</sup>. By taking a prominent part, they showed that they understood what community was, and what they owed to it in their respective places, not only by the performance of the wartime duties incumbent on them, but also by honouring the sacrifice of others. Commemoration thus provided a public occasion for reiterating the share they had taken in wartime citizen-service, and for affirming their commitment to continuing it by continuing to honour the ideal represented by the dead.

Entire communities were also expected, through commemoration, to show their worth, to celebrate their service, and to claim the honour and virtue due to their wartime sufferings and losses. When making appeals for memorial funds, civic leaders expressed concern that local memorials should be worthy not only of the dead, but also of those who commemorated them. Lord Leverhulme told a general meeting of his employees at Port Sunlight that, 'A memorial was desired that would be for all time a pride and stimulus.... Any other type of memorial should be brushed aside as scarcely worthy of our fallen heroes or ourselves'<sup>28</sup>. The mayor of Stoke Newington said, in an appeal circular, that a memorial paid for from the rates would be 'unworthy alike of the Borough and of its heroic dead'<sup>29</sup>. Thus it was hoped that all members of the community would show they, too, were capable, in their own spheres, of understanding their duty, of making the appropriate sacrifice, and of remaining loyal, as comrades, to the dead. They were to do this through acts of commemoration, first by showing that they shared in some degree the ideals and virtues attributed to the dead, and

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<sup>27</sup> York, Acc. 56, Box 108, letter, 13 Dec. 1919

<sup>28</sup> Progress, July 1918, p.79

<sup>29</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/8, 7 Aug. 1919

second by celebrating their own connection with the dead, and their part in the good work which the dead had done.

A hierarchy of moral worth was established, with the dead at its apex and other members of the community ranged below, worthy in some degree, themselves; although the worthiness of the living was expressed through their connection with the dead, as comrades, friends and mourners. If the war had been a purging and morally elevating experience, it had been so for all, not only for the dead, and commemoration acknowledged this. J.M.Barrie implied something of the sort when he wrote to Lutyens about the Cenotaph, 'I stand cogitating why and how it is so noble a thing. It is how the war has moved you and lifted you above yourself',<sup>30</sup>. The monument, in other words, owed its quality to the impact of the war on its designer's work. He had shared some, at least, of the spiritual elevation of the war experience epitomised by the dead, and had expressed its impact on himself in honouring them.

Those who participated in commemoration were not merely tutees and beneficiaries of the dead, but also guardians of their achievements and comrades in their struggle, sharing, to some extent, their spiritual achievement, and taking responsibility for its preservation. They had an obligation to be active citizens, builders of a new world in honour of the dead, charged with creating a community imbued with their values, in which the work the dead had begun would be continued. All who participated in commemoration could claim the right to be heard, and to have their views and actions respected, in the process of remaking the post-war world, by virtue of their comradeship with and loyalty to the dead.

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<sup>30</sup> Letter 6 Aug. 1919, quoted in C.Hussey The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens, London 1950, p.393



## 2. The Horror of War

The Great War had appeared to many people, combatants and non-combatants alike, to have been an unprecedented horror. Knowledge of the horror gave dramatic substance to the idea that military service had been a moral triumph for those who had undertaken it. In facing it, the soldier-martyr had endured hell for his faith and his friends. During the war itself, the squalid and frightening character of battle conditions had been gradually recognised by the public at home, and had prompted the idea that soldiers were heroic at least as much for their capacity to face the horror as for their courage or skill in combat. What distinguished post-war from pre-war attempts to give moral significance to the experience of war was the post-war recognition that war was horrible. Death in it was anything but the clean and painless sacrificial act which the National Service League had claimed it was in its pamphlet of 1903<sup>31</sup>. Nonetheless, it was a sacrifice; all the more so because of the acute suffering it involved.

While the horror of war contributed to the image of the war dead as martyrs, it also posed the urgent political question of how to avoid such a catastrophe in future. There was great anxiety in the inter-war period about the destructive effect of a future world conflict. Concern focused especially on the aerial bombing of civilian populations and the use of poison gas. Neither of these had been developed into strategically effective weapons during the First World War, and experience of bombing was extremely limited, but the mere knowledge of their possibility caused a great deal of alarm. Imaginary accounts of their effects were published either in explicit disarmament propaganda or in fiction<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> See chapter 7, p.265

<sup>32</sup> See I.F.Clarke, Voices Propheying War, London 1970

In his expectations for any future war, published in 1924, Philip Gibbs even imagined a new horror, which he presumably regarded as a credible technical possibility in the near future. He feared that 'some "death ray" projecting wireless force may sweep a countryside with heat that would turn everything to flame and then to dust and ashes',<sup>33</sup>. This image probably owed more to memories of H.G.Wells' War of the Worlds than to the recent war in Europe. Much of the fear of future weapons was derived, not from anything actually experienced in the war, but rather from the enormous technical potential for destruction which the war had revealed. What was derived from the war experience was the general idea that combat and enemy occupation were horrible, and that the application of modern technology to warfare could produce the ultimate catastrophe. The possibility of air attack meant that in a future war such horrors would be extended even to Britain.

It was widely held that the best the living could do to prevent the deaths of those they remembered from being squandered was to prevent war occurring again. General Sir Charles Harington told his audience at the unveiling of Keighley war memorial in 1924: 'Those whom we are honouring today trusted us, and we are in honour bound to carry on their great work...the preservation of peace',<sup>34</sup>. The Daily Mirror's reporter in Westminster Abbey on Armistice Day 1935 wrote, 'To those gathered round the tomb it was as if the spirits of a million dead hovered over that humble grave to utter a solemn warning .... "You break faith with us if you let war raise its head again",<sup>35</sup>. One of the inscriptions on Barnsley war memorial reads: 'and we in faith keep that peace for which they paid'. The chief lesson taught by the

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<sup>33</sup> P.Gibbs, Ten Years After, p.178

<sup>34</sup> Keighley News, 13 Dec. 1924

<sup>35</sup> Daily Mirror, 12 Nov. 1935



suffering of war was now taken to be the necessity for peace<sup>36</sup>.

Many thought that a public reminder of how terrible war was should be central to the commemoration of those who had suffered most in it. We have seen that Philip Gibbs believed war memorials should be 'warnings of what war means', and the architect C. Stanley Peach wrote to The Builder to argue that: 'Ethically, a National Memorial has no connection with war except in so far as it can expose its atrocity and waste, and turn it to account as an aid to prevention',<sup>37</sup>. References to the horror of war were used to reinforce the urgency of this task. At the unveiling of Brancepeth war memorial, in 1921, the officiating clergyman said: 'a cross reminded them of the horrors and the wickedness of war, and helped them to the declaration "never again will the earth be blasted by this terrible curse"', and it was a sign 'that they should each do their part to produce a peaceful atmosphere',<sup>38</sup>. The Dean of Leeds Roman Catholic cathedral prayed at the unveiling of that city's war memorial in 1922 that it 'may serve to fill us with a horror of war',<sup>39</sup>.

The Royal Artillery memorial (ill.58) was understood to refer vividly to war's horror<sup>40</sup>. The Times commented that

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<sup>36</sup> An idea that the justification for fighting the First World War was to end war for ever was current from its earliest days. It had been advanced by J.L. Garvin, editor of The Observer, and H.G. Wells, as an argument in favour of participation in the war. It continued to be used after the war to advocate support for the League of Nations as a way of honouring the moral obligation to the dead.

<sup>37</sup> Builder, v.118, 2 Jan. 1920, p.5

<sup>38</sup> Durham County Advertiser, 10 June 1921

<sup>39</sup> Yorkshire Weekly Post, 21 Oct. 1922

<sup>40</sup> The assumption that a memorial should be a warning about the nature of war was not always approved. Colonel Lewin of the Royal Artillery believed that Charles Jagger

'in the strict sense of the word, it is awful',<sup>41</sup>. Selwyn Image, former Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford, praised the reliefs on the sides of the memorial for showing 'the unspeakable horror of the war and the strenuously noble part played by the artillery',<sup>42</sup>. A major in the Royal Field Artillery wrote to The Times after its unveiling to say that it was 'terrible in its actuality, terribly real, terribly powerful - a lasting memorial of horrible, bloody war, of what human flesh did and can endure; an enduring memorial that war means destruction',<sup>43</sup>. It was, he thought, what the dead would have wanted as their memorial.

Even though the horrors of war were invoked at remembrance ceremonies, they were rarely described. The memorials at Brancepeth (ill.17) and Leeds (ills.53-55) contain no images which remotely suggest that war is horrible, although the speakers quoted above hoped they would convey the idea. Even so, most people must have had a vivid image of what was being referred to, if only from the writings of observers like Philip Gibbs. There is no basis for thinking that civilians were kept in ignorance by the silence of ex-soldiers. In fact, the reticence of veterans may well have increased the fascination of non-combatants with this aspect of warfare. Well before the now better known literary accounts of writers like Graves and Sassoon, Gibbs's book

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intended his design for the regiment's memorial to teach a lesson about the horror of war (Royal Artillery, min. 12 Nov. 1924), although he was probably mistaken in this (see J.Glaves-Smith, 'Realism and Propaganda in the Work of Charles Sargeant Jagger', pp.61 and 68-9, for a discussion of whether or not Jagger thought memorials should be warnings about the horror of war). He thought that, while the determination to warn was entirely creditable, it was not appropriate to do this in a memorial, which should be a consolation to the bereaved and a reminder of the outstanding qualities of the dead.

<sup>41</sup> Times, 29 Oct. 1925

<sup>42</sup> Times, 22 Oct. 1925

<sup>43</sup> Times, 20 Oct. 1925



Realities of War, had gone into gruesome detail about the more unpalatable aspects of combat<sup>44</sup>. The book was certainly familiar to many people. It was reviewed in the Times Literary Supplement and The Times<sup>45</sup>. The latter called it 'a wonderfully faithful and moving picture of how they lived and fought and suffered and swore'.

A collection of Wilfred Owen's poems, published by Siegfried Sassoon in 1920, was reviewed in the TLS in that year, and again in 1921. Both reviewers thought his descriptions of trench conditions were historically and morally valuable. One wrote that they revealed:

a great range of realities...which, because of the horror and anguish associated with them, men do conspire to glose over and hush up. War...involves savagery; it demands of men such cruel outrage against their human instincts that as a moral experience it is essentially unbearable<sup>46</sup>.

So, in spite of the reviewer's belief that the details had been hushed up, images of the horrors of war were available from the beginning to fill out the polemical stress laid on them in the remembrance of the dead.

For many people, Armistice Day and the surrounding period, being a reminder of the horrors of war and of the need to prevent it, became an occasion for discussing armaments policy, international relations, and how peace might be preserved. In 1922 the League of Nations Union (LNU), a voluntary organisation led by Lord Robert Cecil and

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<sup>44</sup> See chapter 7, pp.246-247

<sup>45</sup> Times Literary Supplement, 4 Mar. 1920, p.151; Times, 26 Feb. 1920

<sup>46</sup> Times Literary Supplement, 6 Jan. 1921, p.6

dedicated to encouraging popular support for the League<sup>47</sup>, began to focus on the period around 11 November as a time for putting itself before the public. This move was led by the Welsh National Council of the Union, under the chairmanship of the coal millionaire David Davis, Lord Davis of Llandinam, who believed strongly in the virtue of properly organised campaigning. At its first annual meeting in 1922 the Welsh National Council suggested a year-long timetable for branches, stressing the use of the period around Armistice Day. It recommended a recruiting effort in October to culminate in Armistice Week, and asked 'can the branch make Armistice week, the Enrolment week, the renewal week, *the week of its year?*'<sup>48</sup>

LNU branches throughout the country appear to have adopted the Welsh focus on Armistice Day. In 1925 LNU headquarters in London asked branches to do a house to house canvass in Armistice Week. There were big rallies organised in Manchester, Hull and Grimsby, and in Derby the union branch organised a civic demonstration which was said to include 'representatives of practically every interest in the town'<sup>49</sup>. In the thirties recruiting campaigns continued to be mounted in early November. In 1936 Peace Weeks were held in several places, and the one in Bolton, in late September, included illumination of the town war memorial<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> The LNU was a large, cross-party organisation with many political and civic leaders, and clergy of all denominations amongst its members. In social terms it was more than a pressure group, having many characteristics of a nationwide civic institution. See D.S.Birn, The League of Nations Union, Oxford 1981.

<sup>48</sup> Headway, v.4, n.6, Jan. 1922, p.119 (emphasis in original).

<sup>49</sup> Headway, v.8, n.12, Dec. 1925, p.239

<sup>50</sup> Headway, v.18, n.11, Nov. 1936, p.218



The opportunity which remembrance events offered to publicise a point of view about the preservation of peace was open to all shades of opinion, and it was taken. In the 1930s, pacifist organisations such as the Peace Pledge Union and Quakers held meetings and distributed literature on Armistice Day to the large crowds who assembled for the two minutes silence. In 1933, against resistance from the British Legion, the Co-operative Women's Guild began to sell white poppies as emblems of peace in an attempt to introduce a new symbol into the rituals of remembrance. At an Armistice Day peace meeting in 1936 the Reverend Dick Sheppard, founder of the Peace Pledge Union, and a very well known and loved pacifist, coupled the horrors of war with a sense of obligation to the dead to resist it in an exhortation to work for peace:

...in the silence of those moments when the veil that hides us from the other world kind of wavers like gossamer in a slight breeze; we who look back into the faces of those we knew and those we loved, and whom, before God, we still look upon as martyrs for peace because they died to end war, we cannot easily today...forget what it cost them to do what they did, believing they were doing so to save us from that hell, nor can we forget the terrible, ghastly, awful way in which we are failing them, because it does look, doesn't it...that we are not to be depended on<sup>51</sup>.

On the other hand, those in favour of strong defences as a deterrent to war took the same opportunities. The Conservative MP, Robert Boothby, issued an Armistice Day address to his constituents in 1934 in which he argued that air rearmament was now necessary, and that by combining it with 'a wise and constructive foreign policy we can still

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<sup>51</sup> Published in Reconciliation, Jan. 1936, pp.13-14, and quoted in M.Ceadel, Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith, Oxford 1980, p.246

save the world from war'. If Britain failed to take a lead, and opened itself to attack, he said, 'everything which makes life worth living will be swept away'<sup>52</sup>. Stanley Baldwin invoked the horrors of war in a speech to the Peace Society at the end of October 1935, arguing in favour of rearmament to give effective support to the League of Nations:

We live under the shadow of the last war and its memories still sicken us. We remember what war is, with no glory in it but the heroism of man. Have you thought what it has meant to the world to have had that swathe of death cut through the loveliest and the best of our contemporaries, how public life has suffered because those who would have been ready to take over from our tired and disillusioned generation are not there<sup>53</sup>?

Plainly, the destructive nature of war and the obligation to prevent it in future could be used to justify a variety of points of view about how peace could be preserved. As Stanley Baldwin said in his speech to the Peace Society, 'It is not difficult to choose peace... But to make your choice effective - that is not so easy'<sup>54</sup>. The question of how to achieve an effective peace was rehearsed in the press and in political speeches year after year in the period around Armistice Day.

The idea that war was horrible was an important part of the consensus on which a widely shared practice of commemoration was based, precisely because it could be interpreted in such

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in P.Kyba, Covenants without the Sword: Public Opinion and British Defence Policy 1931-1935, Waterloo, Ontario, 1983, p.123

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in G.M.Young, Stanley Baldwin, London 1952

<sup>54</sup> Morning Post, 9 Nov. 1933



a variety of ways. There were many war veterans, some of them professional soldiers, who were not prepared to draw the conclusion that a military career or the values of military life were themselves questionable. They had, in some ways, enjoyed their time in the armed forces, and regarded their experience of war as positive. In an article entitled 'Lets Be Frank About the War',<sup>55</sup> published in 1933, Oliver Locker Lampson, an MP and former naval officer, confessed that, though he hated war, 'I am afraid I occasionally like fighting'. War, he believed, also had the 'virtue' of producing a sense of national purpose and co-operation. Nonetheless, such people could see a side to war, represented by the suffering inflicted on women and children, rather than on the men involved in the fighting, which made it imperative to avoid future wars. Locker Lampson continued: 'If only for "the mother and kids" there should be no more war. The woe of women would exceed as never before the agony of men'. In 1932, Sir Ian Hamilton wrote in the British Legion Journal that he had enjoyed his career as soldier, and his attitude to warfare changed only after the Great War, when he discovered the extent of the bereavement it had inflicted on women and children. 'The widows and orphans are the people who have overcome my admiration for feats of arms', he said<sup>56</sup>.

To these people, willingness to come to the armed defence of the nation remained important, but they accepted that a crucial element in the nation's defence was preventing conflict. In any future war all sides would, in effect, be losers because of the domestic destruction which would occur, and the suffering of non-combatants which that would entail. By adopting this conception of the horrors of war, career service personnel, veterans who continued to value their war experiences, and politicians who wanted to

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<sup>55</sup> British Legion Journal, v.13, n.3, Sept. 1933, p.81

<sup>56</sup> British Legion Journal, v.12, n.5, Nov. 1932, p.152

maintain strong national defences could agree that war was terrible and should be avoided, without abandoning their approval of the military life. They could thus join wholeheartedly in a form of commemoration which represented war as one of the greatest evils facing civilisation.

That modern war was evil, because it was so destructive and indiscriminate in its choice of victims, was readily agreed. The evil should be resisted, following the example of those who had died to put an end to militarism and war. But people could conclude from this either that one should refuse to engage in war at all, or that one should be sufficiently well prepared to prevent anyone daring to start another for fear of the consequences. With either of these views one could join sincerely in commemorating the dead, and in contemplating their endurance in the face of the horrors which had been revealed.

### 3. Whose Side Were They On?

If the legacy of the dead was to be preserved, the issues of post-war politics had to be approached in an appropriate spirit. However, those who wished to commemorate the dead, and recognised an obligation to preserve their supposed achievements, were far from agreed on what the appropriate spirit actually was. They tended to interpret the moral obligation which commemoration imposed on the living in a way which accorded with their particular political commitments. Newspaper articles and letters, sermons and memorial unveiling speeches all provided opportunities to give interpretations of the remembrance of the dead which attempted to specify its relevance to contemporary problems. In them, writers and speakers supported whatever political outlook they wished to promote by suggesting that the dead would have thought the same way about contemporary questions, and by appealing to the obligation to remain



loyal to their ideals. It is clear from this verbal aspect of commemorative events that they had become the pretext for an explicitly political contest.

One insistent link between commemoration of the dead and arguments about current political issues was the Armistice Day editorial in newspapers. These editorials were recognised as a regular commemorative institution. A writer in the British Legion Journal in 1925 thought it played an important part in marking the day out as something which the public took seriously. Charting a tendency amongst the public to forget the war (something which he deplored), he noted that The Times for July 1 that year, the anniversary of the first day of the Battle of the Somme, contained no mention of the event. He thought it possible that in ten years time the Armistice editorial on November 11 would be no more than a paragraph, and in twenty years it might have disappeared completely. He added that this 'may seem scarcely credible today'<sup>57</sup>.

Across the political spectrum, newspapers enlisted the dead in their political battles. The Daily Mail, in 1920 - on an Armistice Day which included the burial of the Unknown Warrior - saw the elevated values of the war dead as the source of British national greatness. It asked, 'what makes a nation great?... the example of lives such as these [the dead's, that is] and the tradition of heroic deeds and faith even unto death to noble ideals...the comradeship and unselfish devotion which marked them'<sup>58</sup>. While the Daily Herald upheld the need to honour the dead, and adhered to the high moral evaluation of their wartime behaviour which was central to commemoration, it expressed quite different ideas about the war and Britain's greatness. In 1919 it saw no tradition of heroic deeds, but only 'the crime which

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<sup>57</sup> British Legion Journal, v.5, n.2, Aug. 1925, p.31

<sup>58</sup> Daily Mail, 11 Nov. 1920

called these men to battle' and 'the fond, glorious and tragic delusion under which they went'. Nonetheless, it referred to the memory of the dead as if it were a sacred and empowering talisman. It said: 'by the sacred memory of those lost to you swear to yourself this day... that never again, God helping you, shall the peace and happiness of the world fall into the murderous hands of a few cynical old men; that never again shall you, or your children after you, be sent in arms against a brother man'<sup>59</sup>.

The Daily Herald again defended the idea of remembering the dead with honour in 1920. It argued that the cruelty of the ruling classes of Europe, and their responsibility for causing the war, had not rendered the wartime sacrifices pointless: 'no genuine self-sacrifice is ever vain. It is the fact of sacrifice itself which ultimately matters'. At the same time it urged: 'If we want, as all must want, to do honour to the dead... We must take up [the] sacred cause of liberty' and ensure that 'the heroic common people of any nation' never again 'kill their fellows at the bidding of their masters'<sup>60</sup>. A few days before, it had made a polemical point out of the forthcoming burial of the Unknown Warrior 'who died, as he thought, for the small nations', contrasting his idealism with the cynical British treatment of Ireland in its struggle for independence<sup>61</sup>.

The Herald increasingly saw remembrance of the dead as a warning rather than an occasion for admiration or gratitude. In 1924 it spoke of Armistice Day as an unwelcome visitation: 'Today the knife will be turned in the old wounds and they will bleed afresh. Poignant memories of loss will be reawakened'. It commended a manifesto by the No More War Movement and condemned as bellicose and

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<sup>59</sup> Daily Herald, 11 Nov. 1919

<sup>60</sup> Daily Herald, 11 Nov. 1920

<sup>61</sup> Daily Herald, 8 Nov. 1920



militaristic a recent speech by Lord Birkenhead in which he had asserted that: 'The world continues to offer glittering prizes to those with stout hearts and sharp swords'. The paper reminded readers of the number of Britons killed as a result of doctrines like those he had expressed. But it continued to subscribe to the fundamental commemorative belief that the dead had possessed special qualities - 'the flower of the nation' it called them<sup>62</sup>.

The Daily Mail indulged in a bizarre piece of special pleading in 1935 when it maintained that the dead would have supported Italian policy in Abyssinia out of a sense of wartime comradeship. The British, it argued, were depriving Italy of her rights in Abyssinia, and added, 'If the spirits of our mighty dead who fell side by side with Italian soldiers in France and Italy could return, what would they say to this extraordinary treatment of our former friend'<sup>63</sup>. During the thirties The Herald often did not publish an Armistice editorial in the strict sense, though it always gave reports of ceremonies and published relevant articles. In 1936 it carried an editorial on the subject again, possibly under the influence of the Spanish Civil War. It continued to accept the idea, typical of the cult of the dead, that the endurance of soldiers in the war had been a great ethical achievement, but gave it a characteristic twist. It said: 'Manliness, strength and nobility of character persist gloriously through war. To say that war enhances them is a damnable lie. The world is again being fed on that lie'<sup>64</sup>.

The forms of ceremony in which the dead were honoured were interpreted to make similarly partisan points. The Morning Post observed in 1919 that the public's joining in 'The

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<sup>62</sup> Daily Herald, 11 Nov. 1924

<sup>63</sup> Daily Mail, 11 Nov. 1935

<sup>64</sup> Daily Herald, 11 Nov. 1936

Requiem of Silence' had shown that the nation was, underneath all its conflicts, really united. 'The deep essential unity of this people was shown as never before',<sup>65</sup> it said. The Herald thought that 'it was a wonderful sight' to see everyone stopping for the silence, believing that they 'remembered the awful tragedies of the war', rather than immersing themselves in a sense of common nationhood<sup>66</sup>. In 1920, according to the Daily Mail, one of the purposes of the Armistice Day ceremony was 'to remind the British people they are a nation yet, not a collection of warring classes and hostile factions',<sup>67</sup>. But the Herald interpreted the large number of people queuing in the evening at the newly unveiled Cenotaph in Whitehall as representing not a will to national unity but the fact of class division. It contrasted the common people, coming after work to honour the dead, unfavourably with the concurrent 'feasting and revelry' of the wealthy in theatres and restaurants<sup>68</sup>. In 1924 the Morning Post said that each year Armistice Day 'restores a troubled nation anew to its essential unity, and lifts it nearer to the ultimate deliverance',<sup>69</sup> though it did not suggest what form that deliverance might take.

There were differing interpretations of the meaning of the military ceremony which accompanied the Silence. In 1924 the Daily Herald, while approving of the religious observance, objected to bugles playing Reveille at the remembrance service in Westminster Abbey. It 'was the only militaristic note and it clashed unpleasantly',<sup>70</sup>. In 1933

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<sup>65</sup> Morning Post, 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>66</sup> Daily Herald, 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>67</sup> Daily Mail, 11 Nov. 1920

<sup>68</sup> Daily Herald, 12 Nov. 1920

<sup>69</sup> Morning Post, 12 Nov. 1924

<sup>70</sup> Daily Herald, 12 Nov. 1924



it said that the silence was a worthwhile act if it stimulated people to 'abolish cruelty and poverty'. On the other hand, 'Pomp and parade merely mock the dead'<sup>71</sup>. The Manchester Guardian commented in 1930 on what it saw as muddled meanings in Armistice Day: 'presenting arms and intoning prayers, reverently laying down wreaths of flowers and stiffly lifting naked bayonets... expresses an incoherent sentiment'<sup>72</sup>. The Daily Mirror, however, saw nothing wrong in the military ceremonial. It noted 'the glitter of raised swords and fixed bayonets, the blaze of uniforms, the nodding bearskins - and yet no suggestion of militaristic display was conveyed'<sup>73</sup>.

Disputes about the interpretation of commemorative symbolism, especially when they dealt with the problem of avoiding war in future, were not confined to politicians or politically engaged journalists. At Birmingham, there was controversy in 1925 over whether or not the unveiling ceremony for the Hall of Memory should include a specifically military element. A brigadier wrote to the press that, as there were no official plans to sound the Last Post and Reveille, the surviving comrades of the dead were being 'denied the usual beautiful and touching ceremonial which is the most sacred part of our Naval and Military life'<sup>74</sup>. In reply, a wartime army captain wrote from the University to argue that they should honour the dead, in 'these days of peace...without pomp and ceremony, quietly and dispassionately (just as they died), with all signs of militarism and strife removed'<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Daily Herald, 11 Nov. 1933

<sup>72</sup> Manchester Guardian, 11 Nov. 1930

<sup>73</sup> Daily Mirror, 12 Nov. 1930

<sup>74</sup> Birmingham Post, 3 July 1925

<sup>75</sup> Birmingham Post, 4 July 1925

The imagery of monuments could give rise to similarly conflicting interpretations. Bradford war memorial (ill.59), unveiled in July 1922, included two bronze figures representing a soldier (ill.60) and sailor advancing with fixed bayonets. The posture of these figures caused a controversy because some viewers resented the suggestion they saw in them that the dead had behaved aggressively. After the unveiling a Baptist minister commented that 'the idea of the fixed bayonet was not the motive which led some of our best to lay down their lives', and he wished Bradford 'had handed down to posterity not an affirmation of might but of ideals, not of physical but spiritual power'<sup>76</sup>. The Lord Mayor thought the figures were 'apparently too ready for restarting business immediately', and that they contradicted the motives of 'so many Bradford men [who]...laid down their lives - that the late conflict should be a war to end war'<sup>77</sup>.

On the other side of the question, the alderman who unveiled the memorial, already knowing that there was some criticism of its design, explained that it was 'not a glorifying image of militarism, but a monument to the self-sacrifice of Bradford men'<sup>78</sup>. An ex-serviceman wrote to the local press arguing that the figure of the soldier 'is in the position of short point: he is therefore ready for peace or war'. He continued that everyone would 'like to see war finished for ever', but the country must not 'be caught napping again... So I hope the bayonet will remind the young men of Bradford to be ready not to make war but to help to stop it if it should ever start again'. (He clearly meant that they should do this through military preparedness, not through a refusal to fight.) He ended by describing his sense of the motives of those who had volunteered to serve in the war.

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<sup>76</sup> Bradford Daily Telegraph, 3 July 1922

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



He and his comrades, he said, had joined up as a result of 'the fighting spirit of the British race and love of the old country and of adventure'<sup>79</sup>. He, at least, had not thought he was fighting to banish military force from the world. 'I don't remember ever hearing of stopping war for ever in 1914'<sup>80</sup>.

#### 4. Commemoration as Politics

Why did the commemoration of the dead become so bound up with political issues? Why did it not become a politically neutral, essentially religious observance, in which people who wished to could simply mourn those they had lost and seek consolation? The civic tradition of commemoration was long-established as a vehicle for the propagation of political attitudes, but this is by no means the whole answer. Commemoration of the Great War was novel in a number of ways. A wide range of participants, not only civic leaders and opinion-formers in the press and pulpit, were concerned about its implications for contemporary political issues. Many were moved to either speak or act in public to express their concern. The kind and strength of the feelings engaged was unlike earlier commemorative practices. We need to explain not just the presence of a political element in commemoration, but why it was so important to so many people.

There were two reasons for this. First, the political platform which commemorations had always offered now became available to mass organisations especially concerned with the war and its aftermath, principally the British Legion and the League of Nations Union. These organisations had many local branches which took advantage of the regular

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<sup>79</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 6 July 1922

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

opportunities for public display which Armistice Day offered. The Union's activities in this field have already been discussed<sup>81</sup>. The Legion, one of the mainstays of war commemoration, shared the widespread concern with current political issues. According to its first chairman, T.F.Lister, it

is a Legion of Service, which men who have fulfilled one of the responsibilities of citizenship are asked to join, so that they may serve their country in another and not always an easier sphere. The Legion comes into being because of the problems associated with War. I believe it will flourish because it will tackle the problems of Peace<sup>82</sup>.

The Legion set out to be an organ of citizen activism as much as a veterans' association. In 1925, an editorial in its journal expressed a commitment to propagating political values of a non-partisan, civic kind. The Legion, it said,

exists to perpetuate in the Civil life of the Empire and of the world the principles for which the nation stood in the Great War: one of its chief objects is to inculcate a sense of loyalty to the Crown, Community, State and Nation: it sets out to promote unity amongst all classes and to make right the master of might<sup>83</sup>.

It devoted much of its effort to the promotion of peace through the League of Nations. At the Legion's first delegate meeting in 1921 a resolution in support of the League of Nations was carried unanimously, which, according to the Journal, 'did most emphatically denote that the men

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<sup>81</sup> See pp.291-292

<sup>82</sup> T.F.Lister, 'Our First Duty', British Legion Journal, v.1, n.1, July 1921, p.4

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.



had retained a belief in the noble purpose for which the great war was fought'. In 1925 an editorial claimed that the Legion's special virtue of comradeship promoted peace: 'In many ways does the Legion manifest its allegiance to the cause of Peace: it stands for comradeship: that in itself is a seeking after Peace',<sup>84</sup>. Legion branches co-operated with local LNU branches in propaganda work. In 1925 the Annual Conference passed a strong motion in favour of criminalising the manufacture and use of poison gas. Between 1931 and 1933 they supported international demonstrations in favour of maximum arms reductions through the Geneva disarmament conference.

The second reason why commemoration was so concerned with political questions lay in the emotional intensity of the experience of war, and of thought about it afterwards. Remembrance of the dead articulated for many a feeling that death in the war needed to be given a sense of purpose through the subsequent actions of those who mourned them. As much as anyone else, people who held strong views on the issues raised by reflection on the war and death wanted to remember, mourn and honour dead friends and relatives. They felt that making sense of death in the war entailed some form of political action and insisted on saying clearly what they thought it should be. They also, perhaps, did not wish to see those friends and relatives incorporated into a national cult of whose aims they disapproved, and believed their dead would also have disapproved. Many joined organisations which used Armistice Day as a platform for making their views heard, and did their best to dispute appropriations of the dead which they considered wrong.

If remembrance was to give retrospective meaning to death, it was bound to mean different things to different people. The symbols of remembrance were thus open to different

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<sup>84</sup> British Legion Journal, v.5, n.2, Aug. 1925, p.37

interpretations, and were seen to be so by some contemporaries who recognised that there was a necessity to make the right interpretation. An editorial in the Manchester Guardian on the burial of the Unknown Warrior, in 1920, acknowledged that the sense of purpose of viewers determined the way in which they understood the symbols and ceremonies of commemoration. 'What remains to do to-day is the greatest effort of all - to put into the chosen symbol all the meaning it should have'. A symbol, the writer pointed out, can mean anything or nothing. 'All the virtue and energy of its significance come from the heart and mind of him who uses or accepts it'<sup>85</sup>.

After the unveiling of Birmingham's war memorial, the Hall of Memory, in 1925, the Birmingham Post discussed the meaning of the building thus:

Symbols are naturally and inevitably imperfect things even when translated into terms of architecture, and cannot express the deep things of the heart. But within their limits they can go a long way. To a very great extent their success is dependent upon the temper and imagination of the individual. One gets from a poem in marble and granite, as in the case of a book, precisely what one takes to it<sup>86</sup>.

The memorial itself would not give the commemoration of the dead its proper meaning. What would was the vigilance of right-thinking people, doubtless expressed in readiness to argue about the matter. 'Our true task is to make sure the memory is a right memory', the paper said. It went on to spell out precisely the partisan meaning which it feared the memorial could not convey on its own. 'This is a memorial not of the wickedness and folly of war, but of the great and

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<sup>85</sup> Manchester Guardian, 11 Nov. 1920

<sup>86</sup> Birmingham Post, 4 July 1925



noble sacrifice it asked and received...not of international folly and wickedness but of national greatness,<sup>87</sup>.

Speakers and writers proposed meanings which were intended to make the act of remembrance seem valuable to them and their audiences, which means, in effect, meanings which served the causes dear to them. To some, at least, this was a conscious process, as the above quotations show, and they knew it to be a political matter. They understood that the symbol acquired political meaning through elaboration, and that the object itself did not prescribe the interpretation given to it<sup>88</sup>. Because a number of competing interpretations co-existed, the process of attributing meanings necessarily included arguing about them and persuading others to accept them. In a society deeply divided on fundamental political and moral issues, the opportunity to propose such meanings was, inevitably, the opportunity for an argument.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> See introduction, pp.17-18

## Chapter 9

### Sacred Union

We have seen that the commemoration of the dead contained a number of shared ideas which were frequently given a variety of conflicting interpretations. Participants thus expressed different senses of the meaning of commemoration while retaining enough unity to preserve it as a general public observance. Their disagreements were secondary to the need to ensure the dead were properly honoured. They all agreed to respect the sacred time - the Great Silence - set aside for the remembrance of the dead, and the memorials intended to preserve their sacred memory. They shared the common acts of homage such as laying wreaths and flowers before the names of the dead wherever they were recorded, and they joined publicly with others to show their reverence. The ritual acts of remembrance could be kept separate from arguments about the values which were attached to them, by allotting the latter a subsidiary, though still prominent, place on Armistice Day and other commemorative occasions. Thus monuments and rituals together constituted a sacred element in commemoration which was the basis of its coherence. This chapter considers how and why such unanimity was achieved.

#### 1. Feeling and Commemoration

Originally, there was no universal acknowledgement that death should be the main theme of Armistice Day. The royal proclamation of the two minutes silence specified that it was to 'afford an opportunity' to 'perpetuate the memory of the Great Deliverance' as well as 'of those who laid down their lives to achieve it'<sup>1</sup>. When making arrangements for the Armistice Day ceremony at the Whitehall Cenotaph in

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in R. Coppin, 'Remembrance Sunday', p. 525



1921, Lord Curzon was convinced that 'in this and subsequent years the 11th November would not be a day of mourning but would be the commemoration of a great day in the country's history'<sup>2</sup>. The organising committee of which he was chairman hoped that its arrangements would set a tone to be copied throughout the country. It wished to establish, it reported, 'a type of an annual celebration'<sup>3</sup>, and insisted in its recommendations that 'Armistice Day is not a day of National grief'<sup>4</sup>. The matter was extensively discussed in The Times in October 1925 when a number of letters deplored the tendency to make 11 November a day of mourning. It is clear from these letters that many people had not been treating it as such and resented pressure to do so. They were as much concerned to celebrate victory and their own wartime service as to remember the dead<sup>5</sup>.

In spite of Curzon's hopes, the idea of celebration did not predominate in the Armistice Day observance as it actually developed. The dead were, and remained, the focus of the ceremonies and monuments which commemorated the war. Celebration either of triumph over enemies or of the coming of peace, were subordinate themes, normally introduced only as if they were the legacy of the dead to the living. To a number of observers it seemed that the solemnity of Armistice Day increased as time went on, even though the trauma of personal loss was receding into the past<sup>6</sup>. In

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<sup>2</sup> Public Record Office, HO45/11557/20, Observation of Armistice Day (Nov 11th) Committee, Report of meeting 12 Oct. 1921, p.1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.2

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Recommendations of Committee, 13 Oct. 1921, p.2

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 1, p.29 and note 20

<sup>6</sup> The character of Armistice Day was deliberately changed to a considerable extent between 1925 and 1927, with the element of rejoicing being suppressed in favour of more sober commemorative activities. This was acknowledged by the Daily Mail, which referred to 'the new spirit of reverence which is

1933, in the Morning Post's judgement, 'the balance of Armistice Day is sad: Death is by no means swallowed up in Victory',<sup>7</sup>.

Why was it that, against the wishes of the government's committee on the subject, and of many private citizens, especially ex-servicemen, Armistice Day was concerned principally with the dead rather than with a great national event? In many people's minds the two could not be separated in the way Curzon wished. The official Peace Day celebrations in 1919 combined celebration of victory with mourning in the salute to the dead made by the parading troops at the temporary Cenotaph. In planning the event, the Prime Minister had 'deprecatd the idea of a national rejoicing which did not include some tribute to the dead',<sup>8</sup>. He did not feel that pleasure in the coming of peace could be separated from the cost of war. Not all the Cabinet agreed, but his view prevailed, and the salute to the Cenotaph became the most memorable aspect of the celebration.

In many other places, celebration of peace and victory was combined with commemoration of the dead. The shrine erected in Bradford as the centre of its peace day celebrations included a dedication to the dead<sup>9</sup>. Especially in small communities, organising celebrations of the return of local soldiers, and of peace, were combined with the erection of

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replacing that of revelry in the observance of Armistice Night' (Daily Mail, 1 Nov. 1926). The change is discussed in detail in A.M.Gregory, 'Armistice Day, 1919-1946', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993, pp. 74-102. It occurred as the result of a controversy which appears to have been, in effect, about imposing greater sanctity and social inclusiveness on the occasion.

<sup>7</sup> Morning Post, 11 Nov. 1933

<sup>8</sup> PRO CAB 23/11, min. 4 July 1919, p.7

<sup>9</sup> Bradford, BBC 1/57/25, min. 7 July 1919



**ERRATUM**

p.311, line 15, sense loss should read: sense of loss.

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memorials to the dead. At the village of Scaleby, Cumberland, the war memorial committee erected a cross dedicated to all the villagers who had served in the war, including two who had been killed, and gave an engraved silver matchbox holder to each of those who returned. The cross was unveiled and gifts presented at the same ceremony<sup>10</sup>. At Llandrindod Wells a single committee organised the war memorial, the peace celebrations and the provision of gifts and dinners for returning servicemen, all out of the same fund<sup>11</sup>. At Sleaford, Lincolnshire, proposals for a war memorial were first discussed at a meeting held to decide on the events for a local peace celebration, and the one committee organised both<sup>12</sup>.

For many also, any joy there might be at the ending of the war was smothered by a sense loss. A permanent tension developed in after years between those for whom the sense of loss and regret was dominant, and those who wished to celebrate their service experiences and their part in the final victory. As early as 1915, Vera Brittain recorded her awareness that this division would exist:

...I thought with what mockery and irony the jubilant celebrations which will hail the coming of peace will fall upon the ears of those to whom their best will never return, upon whose sorrow victory is built... I wonder if I shall be one of those who will take a happy part in the triumph - or if I shall listen to the merriment with a heart that breaks and ears that try to keep out of the mirthful sounds.

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<sup>10</sup> Carlisle, S/PC/38/43, *passim*

<sup>11</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, File 3, General Committee, min. 10 Mar. 1919

<sup>12</sup> Lincolnshire, SLUDC 11/6, Sleaford w.m.c., min. 30 June 1919



She believed that 'even if I do not lose directly, my heart will be too full of what others have lost to rejoice unrestrictedly'<sup>13</sup>. The eventual cessation of hostilities brought mixed feelings. Amongst the revellers in London, Arthur Conan Doyle, whose son had recently died of wounds, wished the crowd would lynch a middle-aged civilian he saw drinking from a whisky bottle. 'It was a moment for prayer', he felt, not drunkenness<sup>14</sup>.

The fact of bereavement, and consideration for the feelings of the bereaved were obviously important elements in ensuring that Armistice Day remained largely dedicated to the dead; but contemporaries noticed that the focus on death became greater rather than less as the war itself receded into the past. At the same time, concern about the destructive power of modern weapons and the fear of another war grew. Continued reflection on the war, prompted by regular commemorations, and the firm attachment of current political issues relating to war and peace to the ceremonial activities of Armistice Day, heightened the focus on death and destruction, and on the moral questions which surrounded them. The moral obligation cultivated through commemoration was to the dead rather than to the living saviours of the nation. It was not national military victory but the moral victory of the dead over violence and injustice which provided the lessons to be learnt from death in war. The character of the commemoration of the war was set and sustained, therefore, not only by its ostensible purpose - the expression of a sense of personal loss - but increasingly by anxiety about, and interest in, the political and moral issues which it raised.

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<sup>13</sup> Vera Brittain's War Diary, p.198, entry for 16 May 1915

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in S.Weintraub, A Stillness Heard Round the World, The End of the Great War: November 1918, Oxford 1985, p.262

We must take a variety of motives into account when considering why a large number of people should have found a compelling meaning in commemoration. Broadly speaking, in remembrance, people expressed responses to death, but not always death as personal bereavement, or the death simply of an individual. Their responses mixed individual grief, horror that so many had died, anger that it should have been allowed to occur, and anxiety about the impact of so much killing on the morals and politics of the societies in which it took place. Remembrance also included attempts to moderate the senses of loss and change which death in the war had aroused, and this too was a response to it.

It is difficult to judge the contribution made to the formal conduct of commemoration by grief amongst the bereaved. David Cannadine has examined the remembrance of the war dead as a mass expression of grief, and he argues that 'the impact of the First World War on attitudes to death...was profound for at least a generation; and that inter-war Britain was probably more obsessed with death than any other period in modern history'<sup>15</sup>. Against the views of Phillipe Ariès<sup>16</sup>, he maintains that 'this "cult of the dead" was not so much "an expression of patriotism" as a display of bereavement. It was not a festival of homage to the state, but a tribute by the living to the dead'<sup>17</sup>. I believe he is right to stress the importance of an unprecedented awareness of death, and also to doubt that remembrance was essentially a nationalist festival, although some people certainly wanted it to be exactly that. However, grief was

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<sup>15</sup> D.Cannadine, 'War, Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', in J.Whaley (ed), Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death, London 1981, pp.187-242

<sup>16</sup> P.Ariès, Western Attitudes Towards Death from the Middle Ages to the Present, London 1976

<sup>17</sup> D.Cannadine, 'War, Death, Grief and Mourning', p.219



only one, even though an extremely important, component in commemoration of the dead<sup>18</sup>.

The circumstances of wartime bereavement were exceptional. Awareness of the likelihood of death increased rapidly during the early part of the war as casualty lists grew to previously unimaginable lengths. When death did occur, the bereaved would already have been subjected to considerable and prolonged anxiety for the safety of the person they lost. This was accompanied by anxiety for the success of the war effort as a whole, and consequently, perhaps, for their own safety. Parents, spouses, lovers or friends, may have helped to encourage volunteers to go to war and to their deaths, and suffered remorse on that account. Modern research into stress disorders relating to danger and death, especially amongst military personnel and their families, may eventually shed further light on the exceptional nature of grief and anxiety in the aftermath of war.

Most of Britain's bereaved had no opportunity to deal with a body or tend an individual grave because it was army policy not to repatriate the dead. How far this affected the grieving process, and what impact it might have had on the development of the cult of the dead, must be a moot point. In France, bodies could be returned to their homes and relatives were entitled to a free train journey annually to visit distant graves<sup>19</sup>. American bodies were also

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<sup>18</sup> Cannadine's interest is in the changes brought about in attitudes to death by the experience of the First World War, rather than in the formation or impact of the cult of the dead as a broader social and political phenomenon. He examines the remembrance of the dead as a source of evidence for attitudinal change and its causes, and his purpose is to criticise the conventional account of the rituals of nineteenth century bereavement, which he sees as 'excessively romanticised'. I find the case he makes on that particular topic convincing.

<sup>19</sup> A.Becker, Les Monuments aux Morts: Patrimoine et Mémoire de la Grande Guerre, Paris 1988, pp.9 and 43

repatriated. Yet in both of these countries, strong movements for the commemoration of the dead and the erection of memorials developed<sup>20</sup>. The inaccessibility of a body or grave does not appear to have been a pre-requisite for interest in communal ceremonies of remembrance and public memorials.

Commemoration continued to be vital beyond the normal period of readjustment after loss, as reckoned, at least, by research from the later twentieth century. A.Wiener et al.<sup>21</sup> and Richard Lamerton<sup>22</sup> identify a period of intense grief usually lasting for around six months after bereavement. In this period feelings of emptiness, worthlessness, sorrow, loneliness, anger and suspicion, amongst others 'are so frequent as to be practically universal', but by around six months 'most of these feelings have substantially changed towards the normal'<sup>23</sup>. Workers with the bereaved see two to three years as the normal period necessary to come to terms with the emotional impact of loss, while stressing that the timetable can vary greatly<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, evidence of a decline in the emotionality of crowds is provided in many accounts of Armistice Day ceremonies in the later 1920s<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> For France see A.Becker, Les Monuments aux Morts, and A.Prost, Les Anciens Combattants et la Société Française, Paris 1977, v.3, chapter II; for the United States see J.M.Mayo, War Memorials as Political Landscape: the American Experience and Beyond, New York 1988

<sup>21</sup> A.Wiener, I.Gerber, D.Battin and A.M.Arkin, 'The Process and Phenomenology of Bereavement', in B.Schoenberg et al., Bereavement: Its Psychosocial Aspects, New York, 1975, pp.53-65

<sup>22</sup> R.Lamerton, Care of the Dying, Harmondsworth 1980

<sup>23</sup> A.Wiener et al., 'Phenomenology of Bereavement', p.62; see also R. Lamerton, Care of the Dying, p.183

<sup>24</sup> From conversations with members of the Bereavement Support Group, Saint Mary's Parish, Harrogate.

<sup>25</sup> See chapter 1, pp.27



However, according to Lamerton, 'for several years occasional brief periods of yearning and depression may be precipitated by reminders of the loss', and illusions of the presence of the mourned person may continue 'at intervals for a decade or so'<sup>26</sup>, although these revived symptoms need not obstruct or delay a mourner's process of readjustment<sup>27</sup>. Many of those bereaved by the war did continue to express private grief. A resident of Liverpool who regularly passed the city cenotaph noticed in 1933 that 'Round about Armistice Day one will often observe...women in mourning quietly sobbing over the wreaths they have deposited'<sup>28</sup>. It seems likely, though, that repeated remembrance ceremonies, inescapably included in the national calendar, may themselves have generated much of the emotion recorded by contemporaries by providing reminders of the sort which Lamerton mentions.

There are good reasons, in this context, for not regarding grief simply as the satisfaction of a psychological need. Much of the moral meaning of remembrance of the dead was predicated on its capacity to renew appropriate emotions. It was on people's feelings towards the dead that the sense of moral obligation to them was based. The expression of grief acted as a sign of the sincerity of commemoration by showing that these feelings were genuine. To wear mourning or hold ceremonies are conventional acts. By contrast, an outburst of grief appears natural and from the heart. It was, therefore, important that at least some people should continue to express it. Its expression was valued and, in effect, welcomed by many of the newspaper writers who presented the public with a moralising commentary on remembrance ceremonies every year. Breaking through the

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<sup>26</sup> R.Lamerton, Care of the Dying, p.183

<sup>27</sup> A.Wiener et al., 'Phenomenolgy of Bereavement', p.64

<sup>28</sup> Liverpool Post and Mercury, 10 Jan. 1933

otherwise reticent act of commemoration, grief was an important part of commemorative imagery.

The essential purpose of the commemoration of the war dead was to prevent people forgetting them. It cultivated the idea that their loss was a heavy blow to the whole of society, because they had been such exemplary people, and that the survivors should feel humbled, if not actually guilty, at having outlived them. Remembrance thus played on the pathological aspects of grief. It set out deliberately to prolong them in order to improve, morally and politically, post-war society.

The feelings of former combatants were also engaged by the commemoration of the dead. Some appear to have felt a guilt like that now known as 'survivor syndrome', closely related to grief but also to anxiety for one's own safety. Harold Macmillan wrote many years later, 'We almost began to feel a sense of guilt for not having shared the fate of our friends and comrades.' To alleviate this he resorted to the familiar idea of an obligation to the dead. He continued, 'We certainly felt some obligation to make some decent use of the life that had been spared to us'<sup>29</sup>. Eric Leed has argued that mourning rituals were a medium through which ex-combatants could express the loss of the idealised visions of war service and of the home they were supposed to be defending; losses which they incurred both through the actual experience of fighting and through a sense of estrangement from non-combatants. 'This organised mourning, ...was the most acceptable way in which the war continued to define the identities of combatants' he writes. 'The mourning of soldiers for the dead, ...was reinforced in

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<sup>29</sup> H. Macmillan, Winds of Change 1914-1939, London 1968, p.98, quoted in D. Cannadine, 'War, Death, Grief and Mourning', p.212



pageants, memorials, rituals, and songs of veterans groups,<sup>30</sup>.

However, we have already seen that only a minority of ex-service personnel joined British veterans' organisations. Not all of those had experienced the front line fighting which is central to Leed's argument, and many of those who had experienced it cannot have joined.<sup>31</sup> Thus the observable behaviour of their organisations is not necessarily evidence of a general feeling amongst veterans, and the particular feelings of ex-combatants in general should not be overstressed in the formation and sustenance of a public cult of the dead. The need to mourn the dead and to honour a moral obligation to them may well have articulated the feelings of some ex-combatants, but the source of this feeling cannot simply be attributed to their fighting experience. The existence of a moral obligation to the dead was an idea shared with, recognised and propagated by recruiters, politicians and clergy well before the troops returned from the war, and even before many of them had gone to it. It was one of the conventions of commemoration on which ex-servicemen and others could focus feelings. It may also have stimulated a sense of guilt through annual reiteration, in the same way that grief might be revived. It is, therefore, not easy to know how far the sense of guilt and obligation Macmillan has described was the source and how far the product of the concentration on death, and on the moral superiority of the dead, which was enshrined in the official remembrance of the war.

We have seen already how inseparable the political issues raised by the war were from the ceremonial activities of remembrance. Much of the interest shown in commemorating the dead was supplied by the urgency of issues associated

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<sup>30</sup> E. Leed, No Man's Land, p.212

<sup>31</sup> See chapter 7, pp.260-261

with it, which increased as the Versailles settlement was first subjected to serious criticism and then began to crumble. The Daily Mirror imagined on Armistice Day 1935, amidst German rearmament and a mounting crisis in Abyssinia, that 'There must have been hundreds of thousands who prayed more fervently and more urgently for peace than at any time since the peace began',<sup>32</sup>. Armistice Day was an occasion for reflecting on the war according to one's preoccupations, which included feelings other than grief or pathological guilt. One such feeling was a widespread anxiety about future peace and conflict. Winston Churchill expressed a sense of impending apocalypse, probably shared by many people, politically engaged or not, which had some similarities with the post-1945 anxiety about nuclear weapons. 'Mankind', he wrote in 1929, 'has got into its hands for the first time the tools by which it can unfailingly accomplish its own extermination',<sup>33</sup>.

In her novel South Riding, set (and written) in the mid-1930s, Winifred Holtby gives a picture of the mixed emotions which a sudden reminder of the war might arouse. The schoolteacher Sarah Burton experiences a spasm of acute anxiety while listening to children sing wartime songs in a theatrical show. Her feeling is not focused so much on her own loss, though she has experienced one, as on a sense of the enormity of the losses as a whole, and on anxiety that they might recur.

Like many women of her generation, she could not listen unmoved to the familiar tunes which circumstances had associated with intolerable memory....With increasing awareness every year she realised what it had meant of horror, desperation, anxiety, and loss to her

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<sup>32</sup> Daily Mirror, 12 nov. 1935

<sup>33</sup> W.S.Churchill, The World Crisis: The Aftermath, London 1929, pp.454-5, quoted in D.Cannadine, 'War, Death Grief and Mourning', p.202



generation. She knew that the dead are most needed, not when they are mourned, but in a world robbed of their stabilising presence....and the world did ill without them.

She was haunted by the menace of another war. Constantly, when she least expected it, that spectre threatened her, undermining her confidence in her work, her faith, her future. A joke, a picture, a tune, could trap her into a blinding waste of misery and helplessness<sup>34</sup>.

Holtby's description here probably combines feelings of her own with the experiences of friends like Vera Brittain, who lost her brother and many close male friends in the war. The anxiety she portrays does not diminish but increases with the passage of time, through increasing realisation of the total cost of the war and the danger of another. It is exacerbated by a sense that those who had been killed would have contributed greatly to the stability of the world if they had survived. This, of course, was a central tenet of the commemorative cult of the dead.

There was anxiety of another kind, especially amongst people with a conservative social outlook, about the loss of a renewed sense of purpose which many had felt during the war. They were afraid that something which had been gained through the war effort was being thrown away. The vicar of Alsager, Cheshire, was expressing this anxiety when he wrote in his parish magazine in August 1919:

The spirit of patriotism and comradeship which was so manifest during the dark days of the war seems to have given place to a spirit of reckless selfishness and disinclination for work....It will be deplorable if we

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<sup>34</sup> W.Holtby, South Riding: An English Landscape, London 1988, pp.70-71

lose by our folly and selfishness what our sailors and soldiers and airmen have fought and died to save<sup>35</sup>.

We have seen these anxieties appear as themes in the speechmaking and editorial-writing associated with the remembrance of the dead, expressed as exhortations to disarmament, rearmament, national unity, a sense of duty, a sense of international justice, and so on. They were, like grief, responses to death, though focused less on personal loss than on the sense of catastrophe which the war and the subsequent state of the world had impressed on the minds of many. Continued anxieties about the conditions and dangers of the post-war world found a ready form of expression through remembrance, loaded as it was with an emotionality which was revived with each passing year, and strengthened by continued revelations of and reflection on the costs of war.

## 2. Why a Public Expression of Feeling?

The emotional power of remembrance was founded on personal griefs and anxieties; but these feelings need not be acted out in public through the use of symbolic objects and ceremonies. In modern British culture the expression of grief and fear are generally consigned to the sphere of private life and personal relationships. The Victorian funeral had been a public event amongst all classes, but it was a one-off affair. The formal period of mourning had a definite limit and was not sustained by repetitions of the ceremony. Besides, the conspicuous formality of nineteenth century mourning had been declining before the First World War and for many would have been neither expected nor

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted in A. Wilkinson, The Church of England, p.62



desired<sup>36</sup>. Why then did remembrance of the dead become such an intrusively public occasion?

Part of the explanation lies in the existence of the tradition of civic commemoration. Commemoration had become a feature of civic life in which civic pride was expressed and municipal rivalries conducted. They offered a field in which civic leaders could perform to good effect in public, showing their sense of propriety and of occasion, and they were felt to encourage social cohesion. Any event of national importance could offer an opportunity to serve these purposes, and thus the development of a form of civic commemoration for such a major event as a great war could easily be predicted. But we must look further than this. Members of the public had to be willing to participate in the events which civic leaders organised if they were to be successful, and their reasons for joining in were of crucial importance in giving character to the public acts which took place.

In one respect there was little choice but to make any ritualised mourning for the dead a public occasion. The church authorities tried to discourage the erection of private memorials to the war dead in their buildings, which were the most obvious sites for memorials to individuals. This was, to a considerable extent, a conservation measure<sup>37</sup>, but it also complied with a desire, encapsulated in the idea of 'equality of sacrifice', that memorials to the dead should show no social distinction and should recognise the comradeship of military service. Thus whatever emotional investment most people might have made in a personal memorial had to be transferred to a public object erected, as we have seen, to serve some local administrative entity such as a parish or borough.

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<sup>36</sup> D.Cannadine, 'War, Death, Grief and Mourning', pp.191-3

<sup>37</sup> See chapter 3, p.103-104

The idea that a war memorial should serve mourners as a substitute for an actual grave was sometimes made explicit. Prestatyn war memorial committee believed that 'the memorial should represent in a tangible form the impressions and feelings that their distant graves would produce on our minds and hearts if we stood by them'<sup>38</sup>. The Lord Mayor of Leeds thought a memorial should embody 'the sentiments of our cemeteries and churchyards in a memorial of the same nature'<sup>39</sup>. Certainly, seeing those they had lost included in a memorial was important to mourners, as letters in the records of Stoke Newington war memorial committee show<sup>40</sup>. (This must be set against the difficulty some memorial committees had in getting people to submit names, which suggests that a serious interest in public commemoration may not have been universal<sup>41</sup>.)

However, the memorial was more than a substitute grave. It was an assertion that the dead were special, different from the normal run of deaths through the moral achievement they had entailed. Such an assertion of specialness was important to bereaved people. Exclusion from the list of the honoured dead (which often occurred, usually because a death consequent on war service was regarded as too late) was resented because it denied an ex-combatant the recognition others had been granted. Mrs Amy Merrick, whose husband died in the spring of 1922 of disease contracted on army service, wrote to Stoke Newington memorial committee to claim his equality with those killed in combat:

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<sup>38</sup> Clwyd, D/DM/15, Prestatyn War Memorial Committee, Majority Report, p.1

<sup>39</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 2 July 1920

<sup>40</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/7, Additions and Corrections (to list of the dead)

<sup>41</sup> See chapter 4, p.161



I feel quite sure that I am not asking too much to have his name honoured among the fallen heroes, that met their death on the Field violently, after all, his fate was equally as bad to have fought and suffered and know and realize, that his end was near<sup>42</sup>.

It was through public recognition that these otherwise anonymous deaths could become special and so, to some extent, meaningful.

The public nature of the process through which the dead were made to appear special partly explains why it was felt necessary to encourage, and where necessary to compel, the general public to join in the occasions devoted to commemorating them. It may be presumed that anyone who wanted to commemorate the dead publicly would also want their feelings to be respected by others. On such occasions, people in public space who did not participate were very visible. By not joining in they were showing disrespect to the dead and the bereaved. Refusal to show respect amounted to a refusal to acknowledge the special qualities of the dead, which public acts of remembrance affirmed, and to cast doubt on the moral transcendence attributed to them.

There were, however, other reasons which moved the organisers of commemoration to make it a large scale public event and keep it as universally respected as possible. Many of those who instituted and policed commemorative activity thought it was morally beneficial that the public should participate. This didactic purpose required a large attendance. The more who came the better, and if people whose views were questionable could be made to join in, that

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<sup>42</sup> Hackney, SN/W/1/6, letter 15 July 1923. There is a similar letter from Mrs Trewinnard in the minute book SN/W/1/1, dated 19 Nov. 1924. She suggested a special tablet for the names of those who died after 1918.

was all to the good. There was a feeling that merely being present on these occasions would impress a right understanding of the war and of one's duty as a citizen on those who participated. A writer in the British Legion Journal in November 1929 thought that it was a pity to reduce the number of serving soldiers in the guard of honour at the Cenotaph. Most ordinary soldiers of the time would not have served in the war, so as many as possible should be given the opportunity of parading at the Cenotaph 'to be imbued with the spirit of sacrifice, devotion and comradeship which is of these observances',<sup>43</sup>. In 1930, the right wing journalist Douglas Jerrold praised the ceremonial of Armistice Day as a 'wholesome and disciplinary experience',<sup>44</sup>, and in 1933 the Morning Post expressed the belief that, in its combination of charity to the disabled through poppy-selling and remembrance of the sacrifices of the dead, the 'solemn and...kindly thoughts' of Armistice Day 'are good for our people, and...the communion of a whole nation in one thought of sacrifice and one act of charity is a spiritual exercise well worth maintaining',<sup>45</sup>.

Many of those who wished to commemorate the dead wished to do so as members of corporate bodies, whether mayors and councils or ex-service associations, thereby publicly demonstrating their organisation's loyalty and sense of obligation to the dead. A national moment of remembrance was the most effective time for their demonstration. The British Legion was the public body most dedicated to continuing and expanding the public commemoration of the dead. Although it is questionable whether a general desire to mourn the dead publicly existed amongst ex-combatants, there is no doubt about the importance of the Legion in sustaining commemorative ceremonial. It regarded honouring

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<sup>43</sup> British Legion Journal, v.9, n.5, Nov. 1929, p.115

<sup>44</sup> Daily Mail, 11 Nov. 1930

<sup>45</sup> Morning Post, 11 Nov. 1933



the war dead as one of its most important functions. In July 1921 its National Executive approved a 'National Constructive Programme' which set out its aims, the first of which was 'To instigate throughout the Empire a National Day of Commemoration for those who fell in the Great War' and to press governments to make it a 'General Holiday'. The idea was still alive in 1932. An admiral renewed the plea for one, and the editor of the British Legion Journal proposed 4 August, rather than November 12, as the date for it, because a second event in November would be expecting too much of public goodwill<sup>46</sup>.

Holding rallies to draw attention to its existence was another of the policies which the Legion adopted in 1921, and well-attended, public remembrance ceremonies were a good opportunity to put it into practice. On Armistice Day the Legion raised funds through the sale of poppies and drew attention to the plight of unemployed ex-servicemen, a task which the Legion's national treasurer suggested in 1932 had become its most important duty<sup>47</sup>. Legion branches might parade in public not only in the annual Remembrance events but on other military anniversaries (often the dates of battles in which local units had participated), or on Empire Day. Most of all, these events were opportunities for the reaffirmation of the Legion's own solidarity. In 1923 the Journal noted that the Legion's own Whitsun ceremony at the Cenotaph 'offered fresh opportunity to reconsecrate our lives to a noble cause'<sup>48</sup>. In 1925 an article stated that Legionaries had to remember the anniversaries 4 August, 1 July, and 11 November 'because they remind us of a comradeship [between officer and man] of which we should be

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<sup>46</sup> British Legion Journal, v.12, n.3, Sept. 1932, p.79

<sup>47</sup> British Legion Journal, v.12, n.5, Nov. 1932, p.157

<sup>48</sup> British Legion Journal, v.2, n.12, June 1923, p.298

conscious still,<sup>49</sup>. In 1932 another said that 'the service at the Cenotaph means...a spiritual revival, and a brotherly reunion',<sup>50</sup>.

### 3.Common Ground

Although we can identify a variety of motives and political outlooks amongst those who participated in commemoration of the dead, all were united in their respect for the sanctity of the symbolic acts and objects on which it was centred. In general, this respect was made all the easier by the openness of their symbolism. Reticence, silence or simplicity, were regarded as appropriately expressive qualities. Collective reticence embodied the unity of all who honoured the moral power displayed through suffering and death, and avoided the controversial issues which commemoration raised.

The most universally performed expression of common purpose was the Great Silence. It could cover all places, all activities and all attitudes. The Times, in its report of the crowds at the unveiling of the Whitehall Cenotaph, said that British silence had superseded the Periclean tradition of panegyric on the dead<sup>51</sup>. The dead were now recognised as heroic principally through the wordless memory of them, rather than by rhetorically enumerating their supposed qualities. What they had actually been like, as soldiers or as ordinary people, was left, in this sacred moment, to individual memory or imagination. Silence was also regarded as an expressive element in events or objects connected with the remembrance of the dead. At the unveiling of Enfield

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<sup>49</sup> British Legion Journal, v.5, n.2, Aug. 1925, p.39

<sup>50</sup> British Legion Journal, v.12, n.6, Dec. 1932, pp.196-197

<sup>51</sup> Times, 16 Nov. 1920



cenotaph, a reporter maintained, that the 'voiceless stone spoke audibly to thousands of silent watchers',<sup>52</sup>. In contrast to the profane world of everyday noise the presence of the dead was wrapped in sacred silence. 'Here in the heart of one of the greatest cities of the Empire, where the noise of everyday business life is continually heard, you have raised a monument - a silent sentinel - to the memory of those who were once of you', said Lord Derby at the unveiling of Manchester cenotaph<sup>53</sup>.

The silence was symbolic rather than real. Many an account of the two minutes on Armistice Day notes sounds in the silence, often the poorly co-ordinated signals for its beginning provided by neighbouring local authorities. The Times, in 1920, reported the arrival of the physical remains of the Unknown Warrior at Victoria station in an hallucination of silence:

There was great silence - The silence deepened, for no one seemed to move. One heard a smothered sound of weeping. The smoke in the roof bellied and eddied round the arc lamps. The funeral carriage stopped at last. ...Still it was so silent<sup>54</sup>.

In spite of the description, one must imagine the scene accompanied by the noise of a steam engine and carriage coming into a large railway station. Rather than a physical fact, silence was the appropriate state of mind for those honouring the dead.

Common purpose amongst all who commemorated the dead was also expressed in their recognition of the sanctity of memorials. The disagreement over Bradford war memorial,

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<sup>52</sup> Enfield Gazette, 4 Nov. 1921

<sup>53</sup> Manchester Evening News, 12 July 1924

<sup>54</sup> Times, 11 Nov. 1920

described in the last chapter, provides an excellent instance of how the sense of sanctity could transcend differences of motive and interpretation. Despite disagreement over the meaning of its imagery, supporters and critics of the memorial were alike concerned that its sanctity should not be compromised. Nor did critics wish to see it rejected by the public. 'Peace-wisher' wrote that he or she hesitated to criticise the 'crude and mistaken' figures because the memorial 'is and must remain a shrine of reverent remembrance... No man or woman among us should pass lightly or think without reverence of the dead'<sup>55</sup>. In spite of what he had said, the minister who had first raised the issue expressed his gratitude to all who had worked to get the memorial made<sup>56</sup>. Later, the alderman who had defended the memorial at its unveiling also appealed to the argument that the sanctity of the memorial ought to take precedence in people's minds over its other visible meanings. He said at the unveiling of another memorial (although it was obvious that he was referring to the previous controversy):

what mattered in a memorial was not so much its form as the sacredness of the thing it stood for... Even though a memorial called attention to certain things that happened in the war - and the war was no kid-glove affair - we forgot that in a moment, and remembered that whatever the lads passed through, they did so to crush a tremendous evil<sup>57</sup>.

As this incident shows, the participants could disagree profoundly about the moral meaning they believed the memorial to communicate, but still agree on the need to regard the questionable image as a sacred monument to the

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<sup>55</sup> Yorkshire Observer, 3 July 1922

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Bradford Daily Telegraph, 31 July 1922



dead. They appear to have believed that its sanctity depended on the respect the community showed it for the sake of the dead it commemorated, rather than on the ideas it was seen to express. All interested parties felt it necessary to encourage the public to see the memorial as sacred. This was all the more necessary if it had something in its form which could give offence to some people. They were willing to overlook opinions or images which they rejected so that they could continue to share in the commemorative act.

Time-honoured artistic conventions were used to mark out memorials as sacred objects. The most straightforward was the use of the cross, recognisable both as the sacred symbol of Christianity and as, by the early twentieth century, a common form of grave marker, more especially the typical marker used during the war to identify the graves of soldiers buried after death in action. Architecture could serve the same purpose. The mayor of Stockport expected the memorial hall in the town's war memorial art gallery to arouse a sense of its sanctity in visitors through the emotional impact of its design. Announcing a revised plan for the building, he explained that 'immediately on entering the porch they looked right along a distance of about sixty feet to the place where the sculpture group would be standing against the background of a stained glass window with the light from the main hall shining down upon it. ...that alone would be something that would make people feel they were in a holy place that had been erected in memory of the men who had done so much for them'<sup>58</sup>.

Individuals could re-assert the sanctity of a memorial whenever they went near it through equally well-established conventions of reverence. A report in the Yorkshire Evening Post saw the openly expressive actions of the public as essential in establishing the proper meaning of a memorial

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<sup>58</sup> Stockport Advertiser, 10 Dec. 1920. The window was not executed, see ill.13.

and making it something more than mere public art. The presence of the bereaved at the unveiling of the city war memorial, it said,

gave to the memorial and to the simple little ceremony their deepest sanctity...each group of them carrying a wreath or bunch of flowers to lay at the foot of the shrine, showed that the beautiful work of bronze and stone is more than a work of art - that it is and will be the collective expression of the homage of the citizens...<sup>59</sup>.

A resident agreed, writing to the paper a week later to complain of people's behaviour towards the memorial: 'You could see them reading the inscription "Honour the Fallen" and yet not one man of all the hundreds who passed did I see with sufficient respect to raise his hat for one moment',<sup>60</sup>. Men had regularly raised their hats to wartime street shrines<sup>61</sup> and subsequently to the Cenotaph. The writer clearly regarded such gestures as crucial to establishing the memorial's value for he concluded: 'I would appeal to the citizens of Leeds to save this magnificent piece of work from degenerating into a mere adornment to the city, and to make it a memorial'.

Sir John Burnet, too, believed that appropriate gestures were important in establishing the sanctity of a war memorial, and in distinguishing it from other monuments. He hoped to encourage viewers to make a gesture of homage to the memorial he designed for Glasgow through the way it was laid out. One of the main features of his initial design was a horizontal stone slab, with a palm branch and wreath carved on it, standing in a pit several feet below ground-

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<sup>59</sup> Yorkshire Evening Post, 16 Oct. 1922

<sup>60</sup> Yorkshire Evening Post, 23 Oct. 1922

<sup>61</sup> See chapter 2, p.79



level. This arrangement was intended to prompt visitors to look downwards, as if bowing their heads before the memory of the dead. He explained that it 'seems not unfitting that such a monument should distinctly differ from other public monuments in so far that an attitude of reverence is secured by the eye being drawn down before the whole monument is seen',<sup>62</sup>. The city corporation refused to allow a pit, but some of his idea survives in the executed design (ills.61-62).

Monuments and the sites chosen for them were often intended to facilitate quiet reminiscence, in order to establish a special relationship between a memorial and the public, and to encourage a sense of its sanctity. Carlisle Citizens' League, which was responsible for organising the Cumberland and Westmorland memorial at Carlisle, thought that their cenotaph should stand in beautiful surroundings and away from the 'turmoil of the streets',<sup>63</sup>. In the House of Commons, Mr Hogge expressed the opinion that the Cenotaph should be moved from Whitehall to a site which offered 'a quiet opportunity for contemplation' beside it<sup>64</sup>. In 1923 an experimental rubber road surface was laid round the Cenotaph in order to reduce traffic noise and provide an auditory image of its sanctity for visitors. The grouting failed, however, and it was removed the next year<sup>65</sup>. A Sheffield resident, apparently an architect by profession, thought the city cathedral's yard was the most appropriate site for a memorial as it had a quiet and reverent

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<sup>62</sup> Strathclyde, G4.1, Glasgow War Memorial, min. 20 Apr. 1922

<sup>63</sup> Carlisle, Ca/C10/12/1, circular dated Oct. 1919

<sup>64</sup> Parliamentary Debates, fifth series, v.122, p.1201, 9 Dec. 1919

<sup>65</sup> Westminster City Council, mins. 26 Apr. 1923, 17 May 1923, 11 Oct 1923, 26 June 1924

atmosphere and gave an opportunity 'to calmly examine' the inscriptions and sculptures out of the way of traffic<sup>66</sup>.

For some people the sanctity of a war memorial seems to have been a more or less physical experience, and they felt a reverential response involuntarily prompted in themselves. When J.R.Clynes, a Labour minister in the wartime coalition government, visited the war shrine erected in Hyde Park in August 1918, he said: 'My feeling in approaching this ground and looking on the cross of flowers is a desire to kneel down and pray'<sup>67</sup>. Charles ffoulkes, first curator of the Imperial War Museum collection, described his response to the figure of a soldier's corpse on the Royal Artillery memorial at Hyde Park thus: 'The figure at the north end...has no trace of sentiment, it is just a poignant and tremendous statement of fact which makes the onlooker unconsciously raise his hat'<sup>68</sup>. A Liverpool resident described his response to the city's cenotaph as a mixture of aesthetic and religious feelings prompting an act of reverence. 'I have occasion to pass the Cenotaph every day', he wrote, 'and always it seemed to me so admirably suited to its position that I must take my hat off in passing because it is sacred ground'<sup>69</sup>.

Men, of course, were expected to doff their hats on entering a church, and some seem to have found the compulsion to observe this convention so strong that they claimed it was quite automatic. The travel writer H.V.Morton, recounting a visit to the supposedly haunted ruins of Beaulieu Abbey, where the old plan of the nave could still be made out in a field, wrote: 'In this green meadow you instinctively raise

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<sup>66</sup> Sheffield, CA 653 (16), letter from J.A.Teather, 23 July 1923

<sup>67</sup> Islington Daily Gazette, 15 Aug. 1918

<sup>68</sup> C.ffoulkes, Arms and the Tower, London 1939, pp.143-144

<sup>69</sup> Liverpool Post and Mercury, 30 Jan. 1933



your hat, for it still seems holy ground',<sup>70</sup>. A remembrance ceremony could prompt this kind of automatic acknowledgement of sanctity as well as a physical memorial. A Times writer, who claimed to have been cynical about the idea of a two minutes silence before the first one had actually occurred, described his response to it, and that of his companions, like this:

we, too, were on our feet and our heads were uncovered. None of us could say by what process of thought he came to that position...we did it half-consciously, as though moved by an uncontrollable impulse<sup>71</sup>.

#### 4. Public Discipline

The conventions of behaviour expressing reverence for the dead, through which unity of action was made possible, were not sustained simply by public respect for them. They could be, and often were, physically enforced. Official and unofficial steps were taken to control the character of acts of remembrance, and to see that they were honoured by all, their unity extended to all, including those who might otherwise have shown no interest in them or been actively hostile. Restrictions placed on what participants could do to express feelings or opinions at the public events organised around the Great Silence assisted in giving it the character of a thoroughly consensual act. People who did not wish to participate might be disciplined by other members of the public if they made their refusal to join in perceptible.

It was difficult not to join in the Great Silence on Armistice Day if one was in a public place. Police stopped

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<sup>70</sup> H.V.Morton, In Search of England, London 1929, p.36

<sup>71</sup> Times, 12 Nov. 1919

the traffic. Managers of business premises organised staff and customers to ensure they behaved appropriately. Outdoor and indoor space was temporarily subjected to the discipline of a remembrance ceremony. Officiants at ceremonies could suppress expressions of opinion which they deemed inappropriate. On Armistice Day 1919 the organiser of the Manchester Branch of the National Association of Employed and Unemployed Ex-Service Men and Women asked the Lord Mayor if he might 'state the case for the living, in honour of the dead' to the crowd assembled for the Silence. The Lord Mayor refused, but he invited the ex-service representatives to a private discussion about unemployment with him after the ceremony<sup>72</sup>. Also in Manchester, on Armistice Day 1935, the Chief Constable refused to allow local Quakers and the Women's International League to distribute leaflets to crowds assembled for the silence, although they had not been prevented in previous years. The refusal was justified on the grounds that if they were given permission, everyone would have to be, and that it was not a suitable activity for a religious service. They did, however, give out 5000 leaflets during the afternoon<sup>73</sup>.

In 1936, the Proctors of Oxford University banned the University Peace Council from taking part in the ceremony at the war memorial in Saint Giles, and made restrictive stipulations about the wording of inscriptions on wreaths and the times at which they might be laid if that was to be done privately. In response both the University Conservative Association and the Labour Club protested at 'a very vigorous campaign...waged against the most elementary rights of self-expression'<sup>74</sup>. Where an oppressive discipline was imposed, it could, as at Oxford, be contested, but simply to defy it was liable to set one

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<sup>72</sup> Manchester Guardian, 12 Nov. 1919

<sup>73</sup> Manchester Guardian, 12 Nov. 1935

<sup>74</sup> Daily Herald, 12 Nov. 1936



outside the commemorative consensus. This would be self-defeating for people who wished to take a place in the ceremonial of remembrance and claim that their interpretation of its meaning was sincere. To appear sincere, people had to show that they either shared for themselves, or respected in others, the feelings on which commemoration was founded. An element of compromise was thus necessary. To join in the ceremonies required at least outward respect for the feelings of the other people involved. To stand out against or disrupt the communal ceremony suggested that one neither shared nor appreciated those feelings.

Control of commemorative ceremonies was not left to official bodies alone. Ex-service organisations also concerned themselves with the propriety of commemorative symbols. Before the Women's Co-operative Guild started selling white poppies on Armistice Day 1933, as symbols of personal commitment to peace through non-violence, they asked the British Legion if they could sell along side its red poppy sellers, thereby acknowledging a joint commitment to peace. The request was refused, however, and a Legion branch officer in Wellingborough explained 'that there was no need of a peace emblem in addition to the Flanders poppy, which brought memories which were in themselves the finest possible peace propaganda'. Another branch member said, 'this is an insult to the Flanders poppy and all it stands for',<sup>75</sup>. As it was the Legion's special day to raise funds for its charitable work, it may also have been reluctant to risk any diminution in its takings.

Other participants also defended the sanctity of commemorative rituals, apparently on their own initiative. In 1920 the Daily Mail claimed that two clerks in the office of the socialist Workers' Dreadnaught had disrupted the two

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<sup>75</sup> Times, 30 Oct. 1933

minutes silence by singing, dancing and banging tin cans. Their office was 'raided by angry people...and the women gave the offenders a good trouncing',<sup>76</sup>. The Daily Herald recorded a number of 'ugly incidents' in London on Armistice Day 1924<sup>77</sup>. In Moorgate a man was mobbed by some two hundred people and beaten for ignoring the signal at the beginning of the silence. 'Bleeding and dishevelled' he took refuge in a shop. Another was 'somewhat severely handled' in the Strand for not removing his hat. Crowds also threatened two bus drivers (both were, apparently, ex-servicemen) who did not turn off their engines. A sailor who was mobbed by a crowd in Bow Street for ignoring the silence 'took off his hat and coat and offered to fight'. He was arrested, supposedly for his own protection, and brought before a magistrate who told him he had behaved foolishly. His response was to ask, 'Why? Why all these demands? It is not in order. People can please themselves'. But in that belief he was mistaken. Pressure to conform made participation in the two minutes silence more or less obligatory for all, whether or not they approved of or were interested in the ceremony.

Desire and discipline were both essential in producing a united public form of commemoration. The unity they created affirmed a community of feeling and a common purpose amongst all who were, whether willingly or not, subjected to it. Conventions of visual art and of personal or collective conduct provided a basis for distinguishing the sacred essentials of the commemoration of the dead from the partisan expressions of opinion which so closely accompanied it. They provided a repertoire of symbolic acts and objects which all could share, because they required no more explicit commitment than an act of reverence. Respect for the sacred acts and objects was demanded from everyone, and

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<sup>76</sup> Daily Mail, 12 Nov. 1920

<sup>77</sup> Daily Herald, 12 Nov. 1924



power to police public spaces and places of work, exercised by local administrations, employers or crowd violence, enforced it.

### 5. Communities of Commemoration

We have seen that several types or levels of community were referred to in the organisation and rhetoric of commemoration: the community of the dead with the living; of the dead amongst themselves (expressed in their comradeship); of all mourners, or of those who now had the obligation to ensure the sacrifices of war were not in vain; the national community (as the community which had mobilised the war effort), and most especially the localities from which the dead had come - their homes. The idea of community was the basis on which a sense of validity, of meaning, for death in the war was constructed. Death could be made meaningful if it was seen as service to the community, as protection of it, purification of it, a warning to it, or restoration of it to an older and better identity. Loyalty to one's community provided an explanation of death in the war, a reason for seeing death as having intrinsic value, and a proposal for action on the part of the living which would keep that value alive. But, in commemoration, the idea of community which provided a ground for the meaning of death was far more than an abstraction or a general moral principle. The communities whom the dead had served, and the living should serve in their turn, were described as specific people in specific places, actual communities which could be recognised - town, parish, school, club, and so on.

Whoever the suffering was undertaken *for* and who, therefore, should acknowledge an obligation to their dead, was announced by naming them, just as the dead were named. War memorial committees normally organised the honouring of

specifically local people by local people. Inscriptions dedicated memorials to, for example, 'the men and women of Barnsley who laid down their lives in the Great War', 'to the glory of God and in memory of Hampsthwaite men' or, 'to the men of Charfield who fought in the Great War'. Where the community was not mentioned by name, those commemorated were frequently claimed for 'this borough' or 'this parish'. Their service to the national community might be mentioned, but their connection with a locality was not submerged in it. Yarmouth war memorial was 'to perpetuate the memory of the men of this borough who died for king and country', and Clapham Old Church memorial commemorated 'the men of Clapham who died for England'. Commemorating the dead was thought of as a matter of specifically local importance, not merely the local performance of a national celebration. The Archbishop of Canterbury saw the erection of memorials as 'vital to the best local life'<sup>78</sup>.

This attention to actual and identifiable individuals and communities allowed the moral value of commemoration to be conceived in very concrete terms. It was not seen merely as a matter of propagating ideas and principles of action, but of creating relationships amongst the people who came together to commemorate the dead. The act of homage - erecting a memorial or conducting a ceremony - provided an occasion for overcoming divisions within the community created by the conflicting interests of everyday life. The anniversary of the unveiling of Llandrindod Wells war memorial, which was celebrated annually, on 1 July, from 1923 onwards, was hoped to provide 'one occasion of the year when all creeds and classes of the district can come together on common ground to do honour to those lads who have fallen for our common country, and this bringing

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<sup>78</sup> Times, 12 Nov. 1920, supplement p.3



together of those otherwise holding divergent views will be a noble result,<sup>79</sup>.

In its symbols, ceremonies and attendant speaking and writing, commemoration proposed the existence of a community amongst all who commemorated the dead, based on common feelings. In its organisation - through the regular expression of feelings and ideas, in annual and other ceremonies and in the raising of memorials - this community attained a powerful, albeit temporary, existence. On 11 November each year it assembled to take over the public places of the nation and affirm its beliefs, suppressing such opposition as might exist through the exercise of official and unofficial power, and thus obtaining what appeared to be almost universal assent to its ideals. Its fundamental principles of agreement were rehearsed in newspapers, speeches and sermons, no matter how divided these might be about their specific interpretations. It was a community not merely imagined in writing, speaking and monumental art, but realised in practice, through joint action and shared organisation. This action and organisation were made possible by the symbolic element in commemoration: holding ceremonies and erecting memorials. The performance of these actions provided a goal around which an inclusive organisation could be formed, precisely because it transcended sectional differences. Many, who did not share more concrete goals, could come together in agreement on the symbolic part of their activity, giving reality to the unity which they believed commemoration should establish, and drawing up a massive audience.

Through commemoration, a movement was assembled which insisted on remembering the war and the dead, and assigning value to them. It also insisted that everyone else should do the same. It defined itself, if only vaguely, against

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<sup>79</sup> Powys, R/UD/LW/234, letter from A.G.Camp, 13 July 1922

all those who had forgotten or wished to forget. The movement could exert power over others (whether its members actually wished to or not), to protect the symbols around which it cohered, and to draw attention to those things which concerned it. It drew attention, especially, to the arguments amongst its members about the meaning of what they were doing, and hence provided a public platform for the different views held by participants. People joined together not because they shared a single attitude to the war, but in the belief that it was necessary to make something valid out of it, whether seeking consolation for personal loss, or out of a sense of political commitment, often both. Something of value must be saved from the wreck of so many lives, if only a lesson that the disaster of war must not occur again.

The commemorative movement was an activist one, not merely an expression of feeling, no matter how important feelings might have been in its conduct. It was concerned with either creating or preserving change. Participants might hold that the world had been changed by war and its suffering, and that the changes must subsequently be preserved, or that the war had shown how radically the world needed changing, and that change must now be brought to fruition. Even those who believed that the war had, or should have, restored an older Britain and revived lost values, saw this as a change in social and moral life, the reversal of a process of decline. Many who commemorated the dead may not have had activist intentions, but the movement itself acquired an activist character through its public commitment to the pursuit of moral and political issues, and to the reformation of values.

The community of the nation was often alluded to in war commemoration, but was commemoration therefore a specifically nationalist activity? I find it difficult to answer this question adequately here, as it requires a



critical examination of ideas about the nature of nationalism. Writers on the subject have given what might be called broad and narrow definitions of nationalism. As an example of the broad, Elie Kedourie suggests that the ideas that nations are natural divisions of humanity, and that national groups should be self-governing, are the fundamentals of nationalism, and that they have become the basic assumptions of most Western political attitudes<sup>80</sup>. Hence, modern politics tends to pursue implicitly nationalist goals. However, Kenneth Minogue adopts a narrower definition, distinguishing strongly between patriotism and nationalism as between attachment to an actual and a fantasy community<sup>81</sup>. Anthony Smith also takes the narrow view, reserving the term nationalism for the programme of a political movement, and contrasting it with national sentiment, which he describes as a set of feelings including 'devotion to one's nation and advocacy of its interests'<sup>82</sup>. Valuing the nation as a unit of social solidarity does not, as Minogue and Smith see it, constitute nationalism. Furthermore, patriotism or national sentiment may amount only to awareness that one is a member of a national community, and that this community has benefits to offer. It need not automatically take precedence over other solidarities.

Some writers have seen war commemoration as essentially nationalist. George Mosse regards nationalism as central to the cult of the fallen soldier, arguing that 'the war monument occupies a sacred place dedicated to the civic religion of nationalism', and further that 'everywhere the cult of the dead was linked to the self-representation of

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<sup>80</sup> E.Kedourie, Nationalism, London 1966, p.9

<sup>81</sup> K.R.Minogue, Nationalism, London 1967, p.23

<sup>82</sup> A.D.Smith, Theories of Nationalism, London 1983, p.168

the nation',<sup>83</sup>. Benedict Anderson has also written that 'void though they [national war memorials] are of mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings',<sup>84</sup>.

Mosse searches for a constant political theme running through war commemoration, and finds it in 'the civic religion of nationalism'. However, he generalises to a large extent from the German experience, where the plurality of voices characteristic of British war commemoration seems only rarely to have appeared. It seems to me that national commemorative practices were less homogeneous than he suggests. Differences between British and German war commemoration were based on differences of circumstance and of institutions. Martin Bach, in a study of some local memorials in Germany, has noticed that large towns often had difficulty erecting a memorial to the war dead, a fact which he traces to political discontinuity and confusion in the urban politics of the Weimar republic. It was hard either to raise money or to obtain the necessary unanimity about what should be done. Significantly, he suggests that the success-rate in erecting memorials increased after the Nazis took power, a development which did a great deal to discourage overt public disagreements<sup>85</sup>.

Gerhard Armanski, in a similar study, describes two localities in which memorial projects were dominated by civic leaders and ex-service organisations, without general participation from other sections of society. At Marbach,

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<sup>83</sup> G.L.Mosse, Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the memory of the First World War, Oxford 1990, pp.101 and 105

<sup>84</sup> B.Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, London 1983, p.17 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>85</sup> M.Bach, Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Kriegerdenkmals in Westfalen und Lippe, Frankfurt-am-Main 1985, pp.246 and 247



the Gemeinderat resolved in 1920 to erect a monument, and it set up a committee dominated by a veterans association. In 1925, the socialist Neckar-Post maintained that 80% of front-fighters and bereaved in the town were against a monumental memorial, and a public meeting in support of one attracted only 9 people. The project was abandoned until 1934 when the Nazi local authority took it in hand. At Windsbach, too, civic leaders and functionaries ran the memorial project without the participation even of the bereaved<sup>86</sup>. It would appear that German memorials of this period were not erected by local movements which included and catered for a wide range of social groups, and hence did not need to allow for a plurality of attitudes to the war. As a result, they could be more unambiguously nationalist or militarist than was normal in Britain.

Eric Hobsbawm offers a useful way of judging the nationalist content of commemoration when he says that, for a nationalist, duty to one's nation 'overrides all other public obligations, and in extreme cases (such as war) all other obligations of whatever kind'<sup>87</sup>. British war commemoration did not, in general, assert any such thing. It insisted that the nation as a whole should recognise an obligation to the dead and emulate their moral achievements. It thus represented the nation as subject to certain moral values and imperatives, but the representation did not elevate the nation, its culture, or the particular qualities of its people, as themselves the source of value, and the ultimate object of loyalty. It was hardly nationalist to say, as many did, that the nation should emulate its dead by defending freedom and justice, although the defence of

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<sup>86</sup> G.Armaniski, "und wenn wir sterben müssen": Die politische Ästhetik von Kriegerdenkmälern, Hamburg 1988, pp.100-107, and 81-82

<sup>87</sup> E.J.Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality, Cambridge 1990, p.9

freedom and justice might, in some circumstances, be used as the excuse for a nationalist crusade.

It is true, as Mosse says, that 'the cult of the dead was linked to the self-representation of the nation', but the link might be programmatically nationalist or it might not. Anderson's use of the words 'saturated with...national imaginings', is rather vague, but seems to suggest that there is little room for any other response but a nationalist one, and that is clearly not the case. Commemoration of the war dead was an opportunity for nationalists to rally, and the rhetoric of obligation was available for them to use, but the same was true for those without nationalist aspirations, and for those who consciously rejected nationalism. Moreover, it was not a question of rally met by counter-rally; people with this diversity of views were all committed to joining in the same act of commemoration, all with the same purpose of honouring the dead.

If we adopt a broader definition of nationalism - simply as valuing cultural distinctiveness, attachment to one's community and place of origin - then we could see commemoration as having more strongly nationalist implications. British commemorative practices were, and were seen to be, distinctively British; not surprisingly, as they were founded on a well-defined tradition. The Times saw the Great Silence as a particularly British commemorative idiom<sup>88</sup>, and said of the Cenotaph: 'Simple, massive, unadorned, it speaks of the qualities of the race...'<sup>89</sup>. The Duke of Atholl intended the Scottish National War Memorial to be a source of pride in Scottish national distinctiveness, and hoped it would prevent Scotland's historic part in the war from being swallowed up

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<sup>88</sup> Times, 16 Nov. 1920

<sup>89</sup> Times, 11 nov. 1920



in that of Britain as a whole<sup>90</sup>. Welsh ex-servicemen at the village of Llanbadern Fawr, near Aberystwyth, threatened to boycott the local memorial unless it had an inscription in their own language, something the committee's leaders had not allowed for<sup>91</sup>. Moreover, the idea of national distinctiveness was quite compatible with the ideals of international reconciliation and peace which many participants in commemoration regarded as its most important political purpose.

The extent to which commemoration developed from existing traditions, and then became embedded in British culture, may have helped to reinforce people's attachment to national institutions, language, landscape, and other aspects of that culture by finding in some or all of them a source of meaning for loss; though even accepting the broader of the two definitions of nationalism given above, I am not convinced that this should be called nationalistic. Commemoration derived the value it attributed to death at least as much from a local sense of place and community as from the nation, and much of the activism associated with it appealed to the wider international community represented by the League of Nations.

I would regard commemoration as being a characteristically nationalist practice if the meaning of death in the war had been predicated on the service and loyalty of the dead to the nation before any other form of community, or before other kinds of (for example, moral) value, thus making the idea of the nation the fount of value in life and death. This, I hope to have shown, was not the case in Britain.

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<sup>90</sup> Scottish National War Memorial, Bundle 19, G. Swinton, 'Memorandum on a Scottish National War Museum, Home of Record and Monument', p.2 (Atholl wrote to the Scotsman to this effect on 28 June 1917)

<sup>91</sup> National Library of Wales, Minor Deposit 321 B, Llanbadern Fawr parish war memorial papers, letters 19 Dec 1920, 7 Jan. 1921

Nationalism, in this sense, was no more than one possible inflection of commemoration. Differences of inflection depended on the institutions and political practices of the society in which commemoration took place. Thus, in a political culture which promoted the ideal of national distinctiveness and rivalry with other nations more aggressively, the case might very well be different.



### Conclusion

This thesis has explored the connection between the meanings of commemoration and the institutions and practices on which those meanings were founded. Here, finally, I shall set out in general terms what that connection was. I have argued that the meaning of war memorials and ceremonies of remembrance was not pre-given, in spite of their dependence on precedent, and on the existence of widely shared commemorative conventions. Contemporaries recognised that the meaning of what they did to commemorate the dead was a problem, and a great deal of effort had to be devoted to working out what they should say and how to say it. Meaning did not reside in the symbolic acts and objects themselves, waiting to affect those who contemplated them, but was given to them by the activities which participants directed at them, either in producing them or, subsequently, in making use of them.

Most of the work required to establish acceptable meanings occurred in the erection of memorials. Creative public participation was required to find sufficient agreement on meaning for a memorial to be produced. A formal organisation for achieving this was embodied in war memorial committees, which provided a focal point for the action of many other forms of institution, including the press, local associations, pressure groups and the artistic professions. The process of giving meaning to the war and death became important in both local and national politics. It did so not simply because the war had left a powerful emotional legacy to those who had experienced it, but, more significantly, because the expression of that emotion took a publicly organised form. The need to organise, and to obtain the co-operation of people with differing views, determined that the meaning of symbols and ceremonies was ambivalent, and open to a variety of interpretations. As a

result of this ambivalence, their interpretation became an important vehicle of political debate.

### 1. Commemoration as a Political Resource

Commemoration of the dead was seen as a duty by communal leaders and by many members of the public. Memorial appeals continually stressed the duty to remember and to make a sacrifice of money and effort in giving recognition to the dead, as well as the stigma which would be attached to a failure to perform the duty properly. Thus, commemoration became a task which the community was morally obliged to undertake - something its members had to do of their own volition and out of their own resources.

The fulfilment of this task itself provided a further resource for the individuals or groups who joined in it. For some, the resource lay primarily in the opportunity to express grief and to try to come to terms with personal loss. But for many, including many who shared these feelings, the task was also a political resource, offering the opportunity to give political meaning to the experience of war and its aftermath by giving their own interpretations to symbols. Participants already possessed certain resources which were valuable for conducting the task. They had organising and fund-raising skills, and represented various constituencies whose support could be enlisted through them. By contributing to commemoration they were also helping to generate new resources for themselves and for other participants: a public platform, an audience, a common emotional interest, a fund to dispose of.

Because commemoration was a point of interest and value for many different groups, it had the effect of multiplying opportunities for all. Participants with one aim opened up areas of action for those with other aims. For example:



mayors wishing to fulfil the duties of their office in this field created an opportunity for ex-service organisations to campaign for clubs which would help them maintain their solidarity, and to insist that the public fulfil its duty to those who had served it. The same applied to other interest groups, including the artists and architects who looked not only for commercial opportunities but also for individual and collective reputation in war memorial work.

The commemorative task could be exploited in a number of ways. For the political and social leaders of a community, concerned to discharge their civic roles effectively, the successful organisation of an apparently united public observance illustrated their ability to lead, and hence serve, their communities in a fashion which transcended political division. For other participants, assent to the commemorative consensus demonstrated that, whatever their views in detail about the purpose of commemoration, they had arrived at them as a result of feelings they shared with people of all shades of opinion, and thus their views had equal claim to consideration.

However, performing the task did not simply involve participants in conferring mutual benefits on one another. It also offered an opportunity to extend local factional rivalries into a more public arena, either to call on new sources of support, or to make the success of one faction more visible. Disagreements about the commemorative task often originated in conflicts which had nothing to do with commemoration, for example: conflicts over the provision of public welfare resources, or the relationship between the established church and other denominations. In the examples we have seen, such rivalry took different forms, but their common factor was a struggle between factions to erect a memorial which embodied their own preferences, and to obtain a consensus of approval for it.

Commemoration could be a political resource because it aroused public expectation and interest, and provided a structure for addressing the public, raising money, and making decisions, which could be used to serve partisan ends beyond the immediate purpose of honouring the dead. Three kinds of political opportunity were created. First, organising the erection of a memorial provided a showcase for the political behaviour of participants, because the activities of a memorial committee were so much in the public eye. Regardless of its actual product, the committee's work was an opportunity for participants to demonstrate their sense of duty and propriety, administrative and diplomatic competence, and superiority over rivals in this respect. Second, because commemoration involved a discussion of the values attached to it by participants, it was an opportunity to put moral and political ideas before the public. Third, the funds raised for a memorial could provide or sustain an institution or facility desired by or for some section of the community in pursuit of a particular social or welfare policy.

## 2. Making Meanings

Earlier chapters have shown that discussion about what a memorial ought to mean, and how its meaning should be embodied in an object, had an important place in the way commemoration was organised. They have also shown that interpreting meaning was a central preoccupation of those who wrote or spoke about commemorative events. The meaning of commemorative symbols was not simply taken for granted. Instead, different, often mutually exclusive meanings were continually being attributed to them.

How did this process of attribution work? Here, it is useful to distinguish two levels of meaning. The first was the sacred. This was a level of shared feelings, consisting



of a need to honour the dead, to regard them as special, and to insist that their lives either had not been, or would not be, wasted. This level of meaning was conveyed through a range of aesthetic qualities and human gestures: reticence or ambiguity in memorial imagery, silence, the conventional actions of respect and mourning. The second level consisted of attempts to relate values associated with the dead to contemporary issues. While the first of these levels constituted a broad consensus, at the second level there was much less agreement.

When any sort of memorial was chosen, its sanctity was advertised in advance in the announcement that a committee would be formed, in appeals to the public and the raising of a voluntary fund. The collection of money from the public made a memorial already a communal offering, whatever its final form. By a process of public consultation and choice it had been acknowledged as a worthy goal for the sacred task of honouring the dead. Thus sanctity was imposed upon it through its production. It was marked out, and declared sacred to the memory of the dead, by the moral quality of the actions through which it was produced.

After the completion and dedication of a memorial, its sanctity continued to be affirmed and protected through conventional actions. We have seen how the sacred character of commemoration was established and guarded by a mixture of willing participation and discipline imposed by public authorities, as well as by informal groups through threats or violence<sup>1</sup>. A memorial's sanctity was reaffirmed by the regular repetition of gestures towards it: raising hats, weeping, laying wreaths, assembling parades, providing guards of honour. Through these gestures people acknowledged their continued commitment to holding it sacred, and to the consensus represented in sanctity, as

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 9, pp.308-337

well as the persistence of their emotional engagement with it.

The second level of meaning in commemoration is found in the interpretations which contemporaries gave of memorials and ceremonies. Speakers and writers of differing political persuasions ascribed connotations such as a desire for peace, commitment to national unity, or a sense of duty, to them. Sometimes these ideas could be derived directly from the imagery. Leeds war memorial includes an unusual figure of Peace, clearly identified by the dove perched on one hand (ill.55). This asserts unmistakably that peace is a value associated in some way with commemoration of the dead. The memorial at Barnsley makes the association more active in its inscription: 'and we in faith keep the peace for which they paid'. But meanings of this sort were also confidently attributed to memorials which lacked any such iconography or inscriptions. At Brancepeth, the clergyman who officiated at the unveiling of the memorial cross, said that the image would help people to prevent war by reminding them of its horror, although neither horror nor peace were represented<sup>2</sup> (ill.17). Douglas Haig could regard the Cenotaph as the 'symbol of an Empire's unity'<sup>3</sup>, although its dedication is only to the dead, and its imagery relates to death and honour.

Such interpretations were derived not from the form of the object in question, nor from its conventional connotations, but from an association of ideas running from the war dead, whom the monuments recalled to memory, to the idea that war was catastrophically destructive, or that the empire had been united in its war effort. These associations were articulated in words which were not, for the most part,

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter 8, p.289

<sup>3</sup> Times, 10 November 1920 (quoting Haig's message to schoolchildren published in Teachers' World)



present on memorials, but were heard at ceremonies and meetings, or read in newspapers and appeals for funds. They were intended to influence the way members of the public should respond to memorials, understand them, and live out the ideals connected with them. This form of speaking and writing was deliberately intended to suggest specific meanings for memorials, and indeed for ceremonies, which were, in themselves, relatively inexplicit.

Associations of ideas were promoted with varying degrees of cultural authority, but many were made familiar through the work of professionals - experts in art, religion, politics and war. Many artists insisted, in public lectures or in print, that the objects they produced had particular associational meanings, and accompanied their designs with explanations. Memorial committees could then refer to these explanations to establish the meaning of a design when they sought public approval for it. Military officers, journalists, academics, critics and clergy also contributed to the association-forming process when they defended the kinds of memorial or monumental styles they preferred, warned against things which they believed would be unworthy, or interpreted memorials in dedicatory speeches.

### 3. Meaning-making as Political Organisation

I have argued that commemoration was a political resource for many of those who participated in it. It could be a political instrument because meaning was not intrinsic to its memorials and ceremonies, but had to be attributed to them through the use of words, gestures, enabling organisation and discipline. To participate in commemoration was not simply to contribute to the erection of a memorial or to join in ceremonies. For many people it included deciding, and defining publicly, the meaning of what they were doing, and forming with others the

relationships necessary to conduct commemorative acts and promote their interpretation of them.

The meaning of commemoration was first thrown open to serious discussion in the press, artistic institutions and local meetings when the question of erecting war memorials was raised. The procedure adopted for choosing a memorial required public discussion of the purpose of commemoration, and of the right way to represent the dead, in which as many people as possible were encouraged to join. Thus, discussion of meaning was an essential stage in forming organisations to erect memorials. It provided an initial purpose and prescribed a form which such organisations should take. Discussion of meaning also formed the staple of press comment on memorials and commemorative ceremonies, and of speeches and sermons at these occasions. This continual discussion kept open the possibility of turning the commemoration of the dead to whatever purpose those involved believed to be valuable, and thereby made commemoration available as a political resource.

The opportunity to attribute sectional meanings to commemoration introduced a divisive political element into it. Consequently, consensus about its sanctity was essential to prevent divisions of opinion from overwhelming the unity achieved in the performance of the commemorative task, dispersing its audience, and so nullifying it as a political resource. The separation of commemorative meaning into two levels - sacred and secular - was thus crucial. Its sacred and consensual character had to be preserved from the conflicting political interpretations which were, nonetheless, such an important part of it. The need for a consensus was reflected in the language through which meaning was attributed to memorials and ceremonies. Participants showed an overriding concern with their sanctity even when stressing the conflicting values, ranging from pacifism or internationalism to imperialism, which they



believed commemoration should embody. They expressed their suggestions for memorials, and their interpretations of commemorative acts, in terms of the sanctity of the memory of the dead and of the objects dedicated to them. As a result, discussions and arguments about commemoration always kept in view the ultimately sacred purpose on which all agreed, and on which the coherence of the commemorative movement depended.

#### 4. The Influence of Organisation on Meaning

So far, I have stressed that making meanings was the way in which participants could be collected into a commemorative consensus, bringing together groups within the community who had some power to contribute to the production of a memorial, and take part in ceremonies. People joined in this meaning-making process because it, in turn, might enhance their own power to serve purposes they valued. But the making of meaning should also be considered from its other side: how did the way participation was organised condition the meaning of symbols? This is also a question of power - the power to make and to control making. The constructive power of participants was concentrated and directed by subjecting them to a co-ordinating and disciplining power wielded by civic leaders. In the resulting organisation, there was a power structure which determined how much influence anyone would have in giving meaning to symbols, in providing a form of expression for participants' feelings, and in deciding how participants' material interests would be served by commemoration.

Chapters 1 to 6 have described this process at work. They have shown that the relationships which existed amongst participants were formed through the system of local politics, in the sense both of the administrative apparatus of the community and of less formal networks of influence.

As a result, these relationships conformed to the pattern of social relations characteristic of the community as a whole, reproducing its structure of domination and subordination. In this structure, privileges were accorded to those with access to administrative positions, to individuals with personal wealth to put at the disposal of the memorial committee (even if not themselves politically engaged), and to professionals with cultural and religious expertise. Although these influential figures might take great care to respond to the feelings and wishes of their social subordinates, it was generally they who sanctioned what might be said and done in officially recognised acts of commemoration. The results can be said, therefore, to reflect predominantly their interests, although those usually included an interest in compromising with others whose priorities were opposed to theirs.

The predominance of certain interests did not entirely prescribe the possible meaning of symbols. Meanings attributed to them by those who dominated their production did not erase other attributions. There was always some freedom for interpretation. Nonetheless, there were limits to what could be said about the meaning of commemoration if one wanted to participate in the emotion-laden events which made it such an important polemical resource. There were also limits to the force with which different views might confront one another. These limits were partly due to rules directly imposed, but they were also due to the interest participants had in not themselves disrupting the commemorative consensus. Its value to them as a resource for the pursuit of their own ends would be reduced if its value to others was reduced - either by excessive conflict, or by a reduction in the inclusiveness of participation. The continuation of consensus required both tolerance of other positions and self-restraint in the expression of one's own.



Commemoration was, therefore, not the regimentation of expressions of feeling and opinion into a ritualised, monolithic form dictated by the predominant power in the community. Nor was it simply the expression of some commonly held elements amongst the otherwise differing responses to the war - as if it were an average of the available feelings and ideas. Commemoration offered an opportunity to participate in a polemical exchange of views, to assert one's own vision and values, and to organise one's own side in the exchange. It could serve a useful purpose even for those whose preferences did not prevail in the formation of commemorative symbols, and for those who put forward partisan interpretations but were unsuccessful in persuading many other people to accept them. For them, it gave the chance to organise and present their case in public. This was itself an opportunity for mobilising those committed to that case, and for sustaining their own organisations, whether or not any further aims were achieved.

The meaning of commemoration was established principally through the activities of organised groups. Organisation was required not only to create the symbols and hold the ceremonies which provided places and times for commemoration, but also to propose and sustain attributions of meaning, whether in the vague sense of sanctity or the more precise and polemical sense of linked ideas about the war, the dead, and post-war society. The extent to which any of the competing versions of commemorative meaning was heard, or influenced the production of symbols, depended on the scale and effectiveness of the relationships organised in support of it. One such relationship was an alliance of social leaders and professional artists formed through the system by which designs were commissioned. Another was that between charitable organisations who wished to benefit from commemorative funds and members of local councils. Equally, minority views were sustained by organising expressions of

support for them, through groups committed to them, who might hold rallies and intervene in public meetings, and through sympathetic newspapers.

The process of attributing meaning took place through organised collective action because the purposes it was intended to serve required an audience, a fund, and a public form of decision-making. These could only be provided through the exercise of power and discipline by or in organised bodies. Even for those who participated with no ulterior motive beyond remembering and honouring the dead, the possibility of commemoration depended on the effective action of the organisations which promoted it, for it was their power to create a special time or a special object to remember the dead by which sustained the assertion that they were special, and rallied public assent to it.

### 5. Postscript

I have argued that the variety of meanings attributed to commemorative symbols did not constitute a coherent moral or political outlook. They did, however, set an agenda concerned with social and international peace, and with personal behaviour, to which participants brought a range of beliefs and interests. The existence of this agenda was recognised outside formal commemorative activity. The questions it posed - how to make sense of the losses of the war, how to prevent them recurring, how to show loyalty to the dead - appeared widely in more general discussions of political issues. Commemoration certainly provided rhetorical resources and opportunities for organisation which could be exploited for political ends, but one might also ask how far its agenda shaped the conduct of politics.



It has not been possible to investigate that question in any depth here. Evidence that remembrance of the dead, as a celebration of citizenship based on service, had an impact on social discipline and on the character of political belief and action is elusive. There are some possible fields for investigation, such as support for the National Government in and after 1931 and the rhetoric of 'equality of sacrifice' associated with it. However, as far as the questions of peace and national defence were concerned, commemoration did encourage an awareness of the horror of war, a sense of obligation to the dead to prevent it happening again, and a belief in the international goodwill of ex-combatants. The emphasis placed on avoiding war was undoubtedly fertile ground for those who wished to maintain good relations with Hitler's Germany. Martin Gilbert has written, in his study of British policy towards Germany in the inter-war years, that 'a resolve never again to drift or fall unwittingly into war'<sup>4</sup>, played a large part in appeasement of the Nazis. It can hardly be doubted that the pervasive representation of the war dead, in commemoration, as martyrs for peace, who would be betrayed if another war occurred, contributed powerfully to that resolve, and provided an effective resource in rallying support for it.

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<sup>4</sup> M. Gilbert, The Roots of Appeasement, London 1966, p.9

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Daily Mail

Daily Mirror

Durham County Advertiser

East End News

East London Advertiser

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Enfield Gazette

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Islington Daily Gazette  
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Keighley News  
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Leeds Weekly Chronicle  
Leicester Mercury  
Lincolnshire Chronicle  
Liverpool Echo  
Liverpool Post and Mercury  
London and North Western Railway Gazette  
Local Government Chronicle  
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Pembroke County Guardian  
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Sheffield Mail  
Shields Daily Gazette  
Staffordshire Advertiser  
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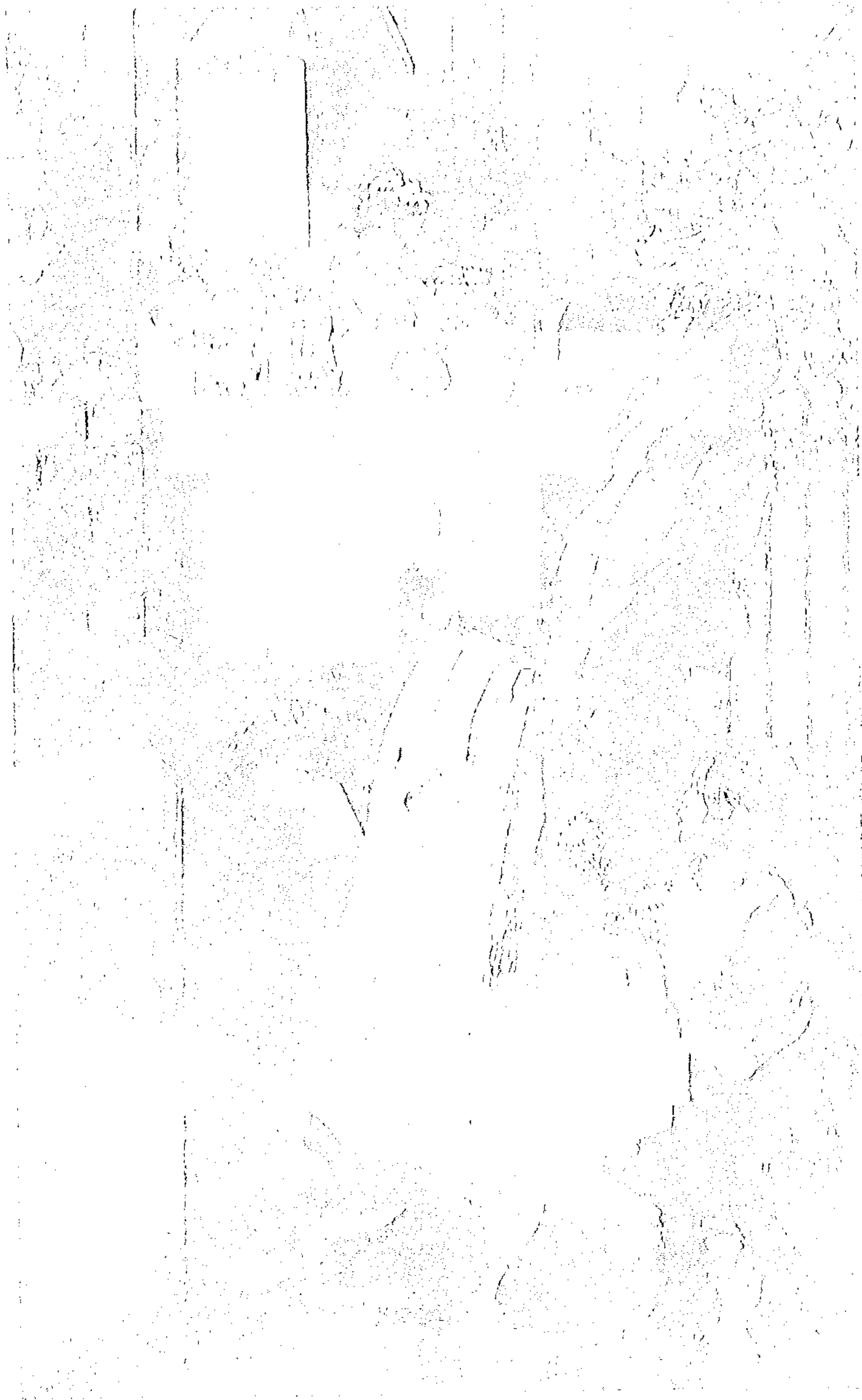
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### Illustrations

Additional details of artists and dates can  
be found in the list of illustrations, pp.5-7



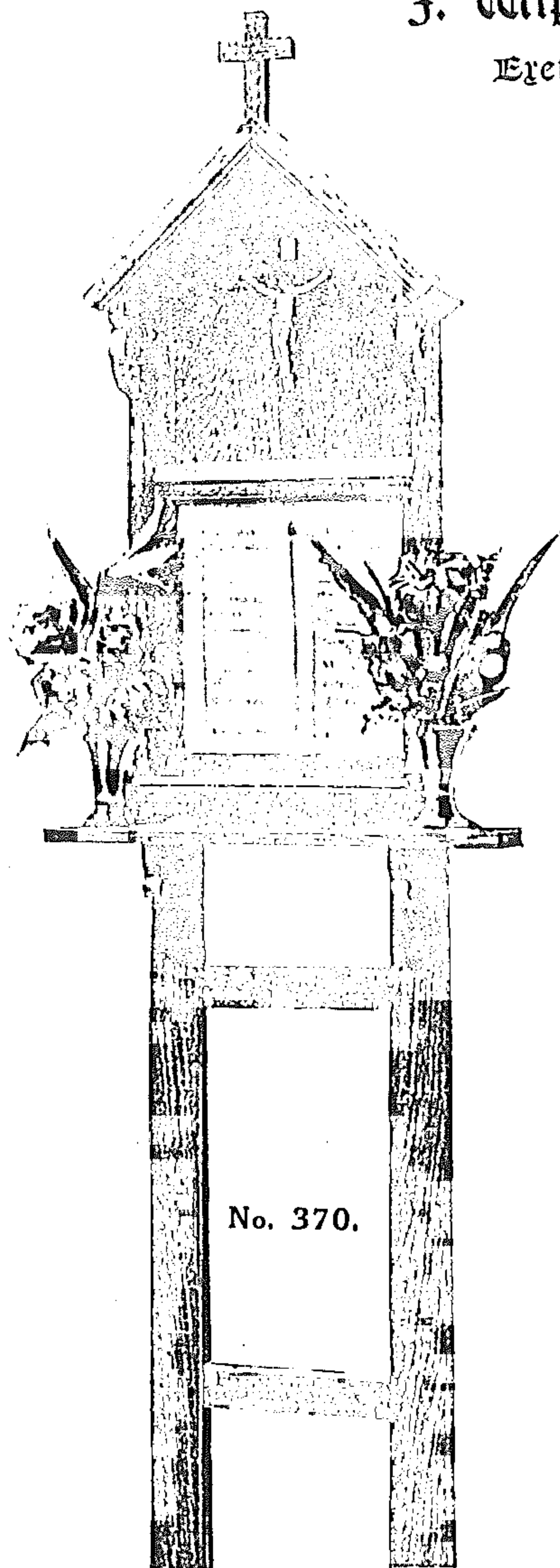
1. A London street shrine



# War Shrines by

J. Wippell & Co., Ltd.

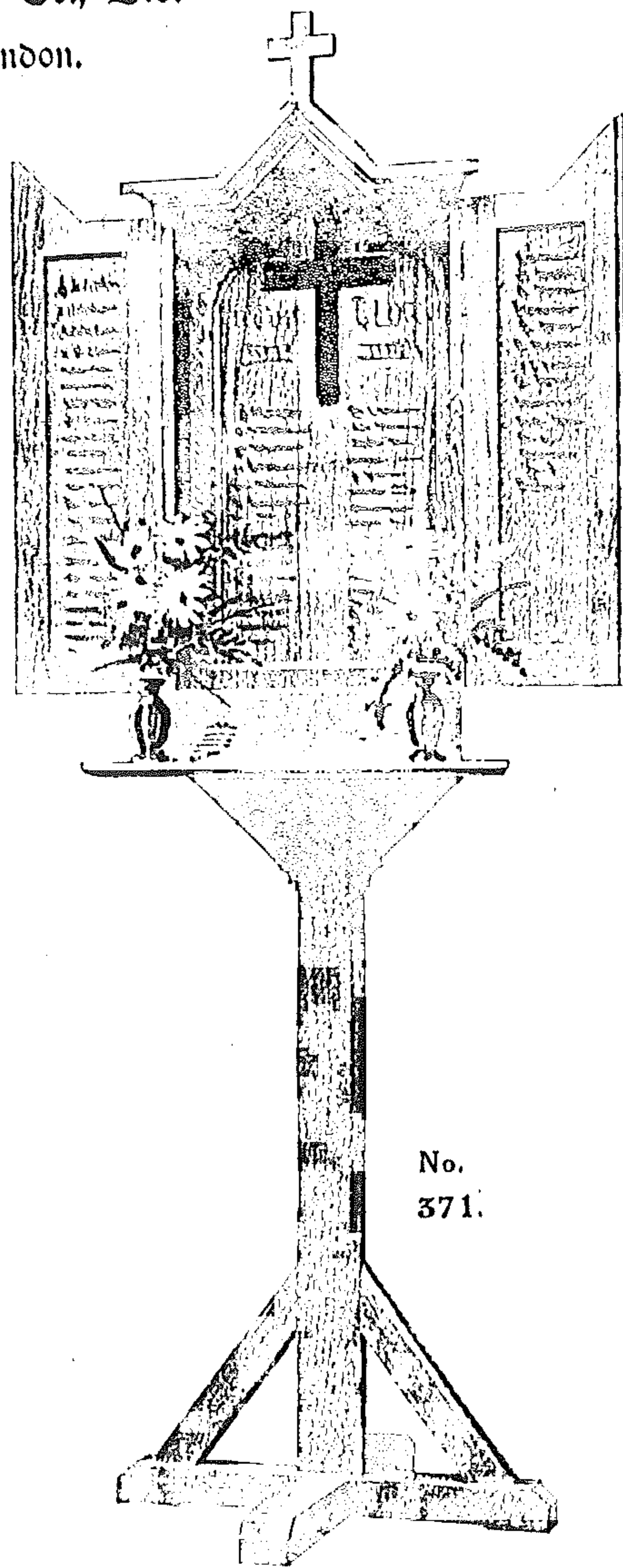
Exeter & London.



No. 370.

## WAR SHRINE, No. 370.

Oak, with posts for fixing into ground, Hinged Glazed Panel to take card for names, Metal Figure, height 6 ft. 6 ins. £5 10 0



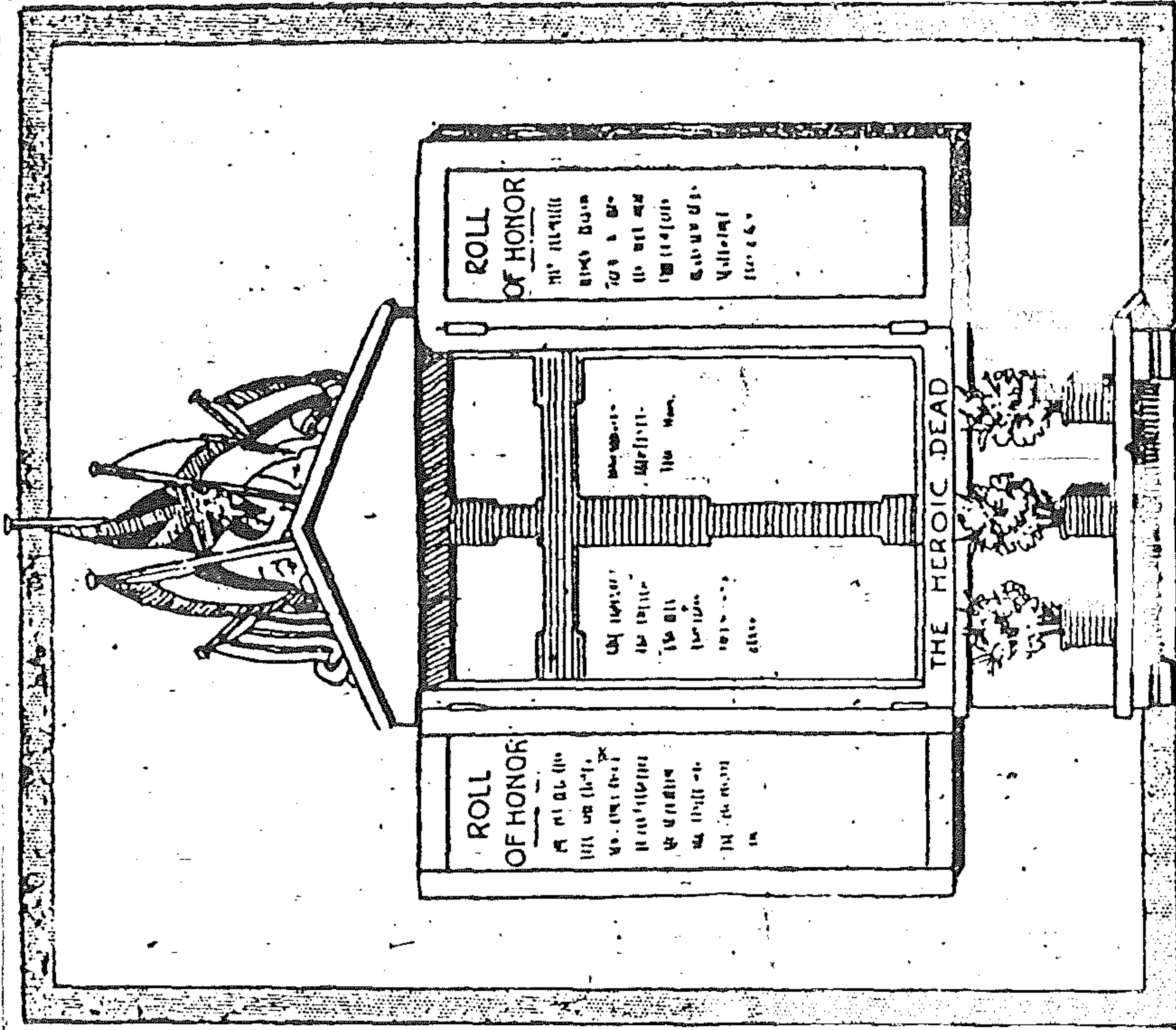
No.  
371.

## WAR SHRINE, No. 371.

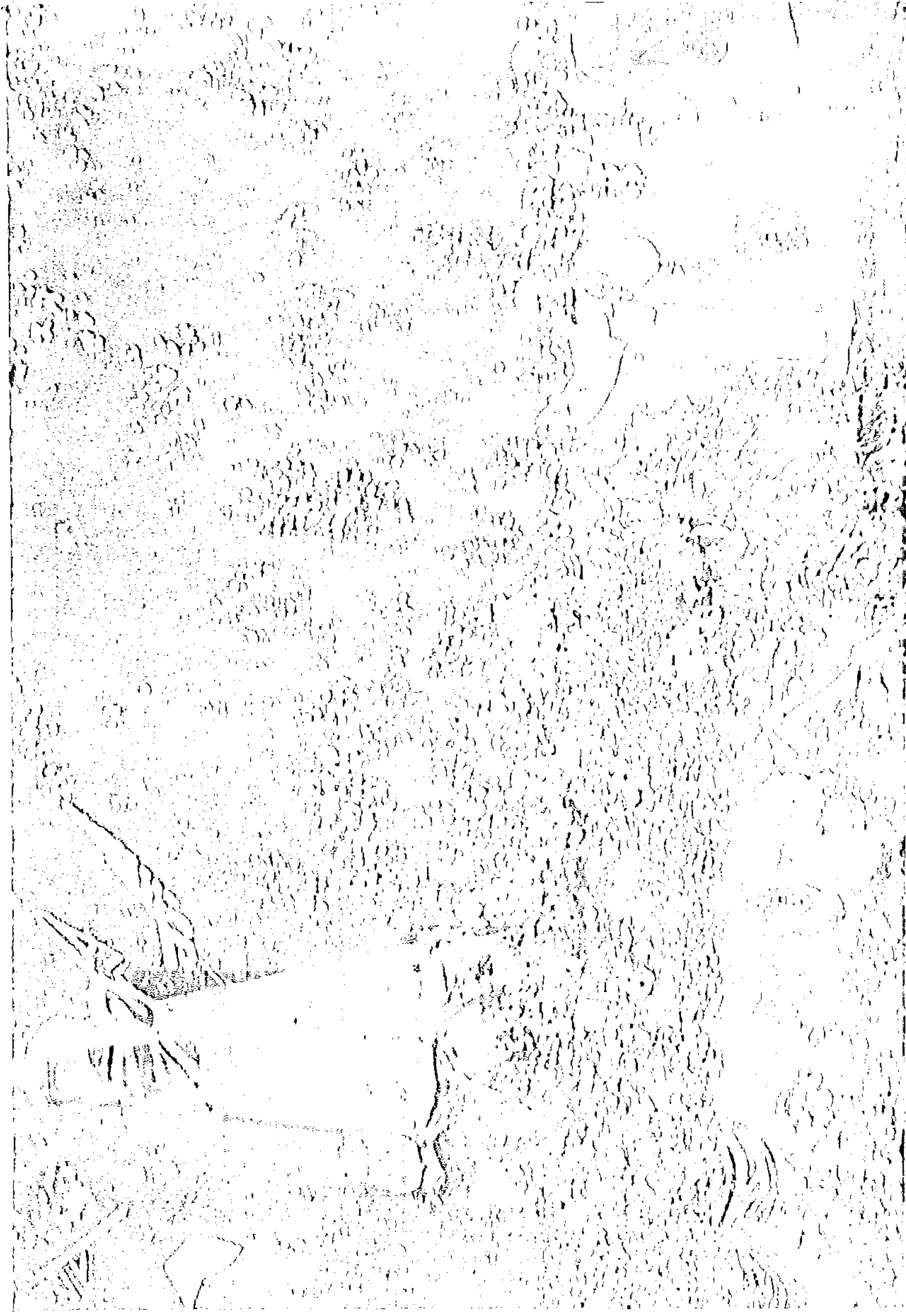
Solid Oak with Hinged Doors, Ebony Cross, height 6 ft. 8 ins. £8 10 0 (Names extra).

2. Commercially produced war shrines from the catalogue of J. Wippell & Co., published c.1917





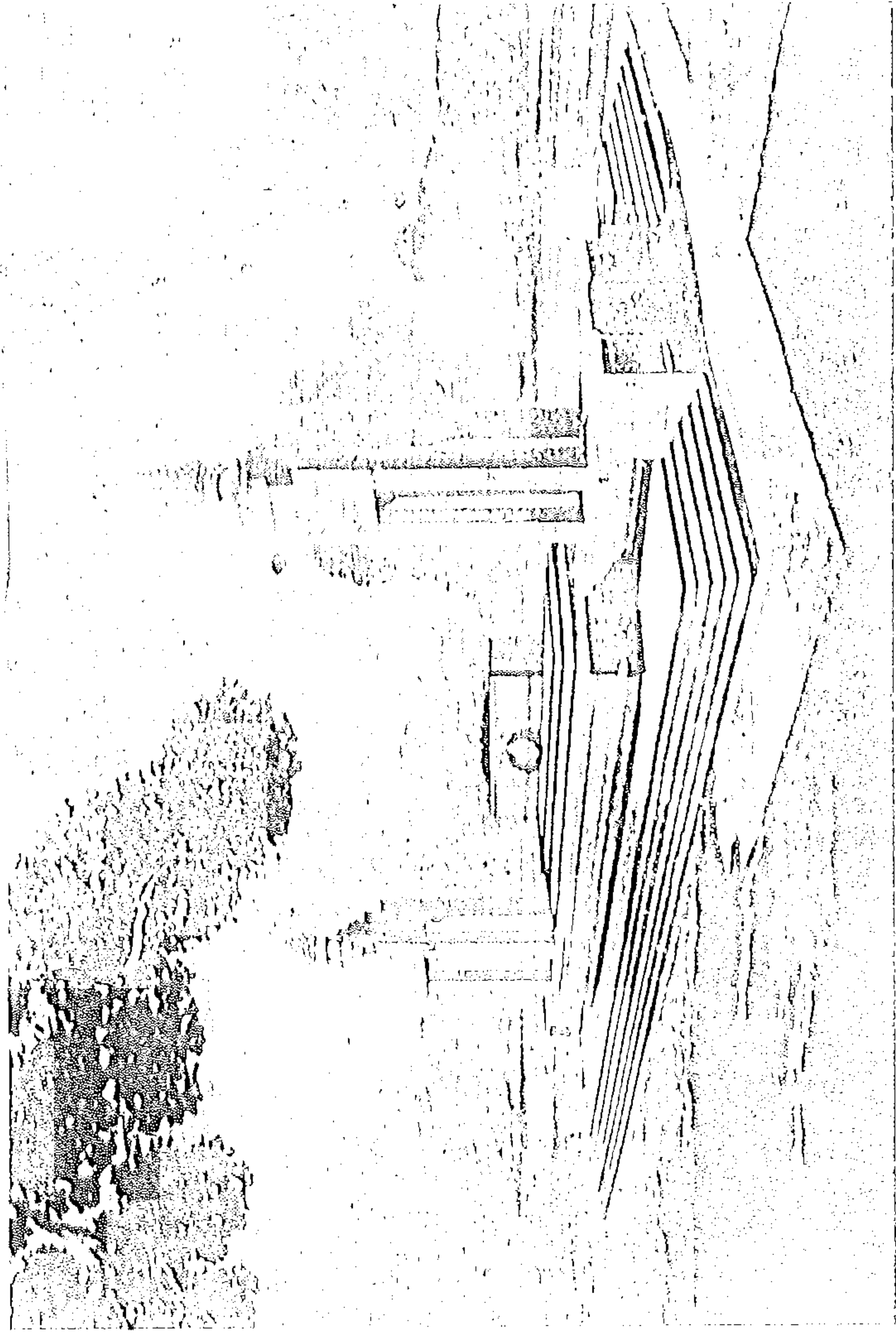
This is the design of Messrs. Bodley and Hare, the ecclesiastical architects, for the first shrine to be erected.



4. The Hyde Park shrine, 4 Aug. 1918

3. Shrine designed for the Evening News, 1916

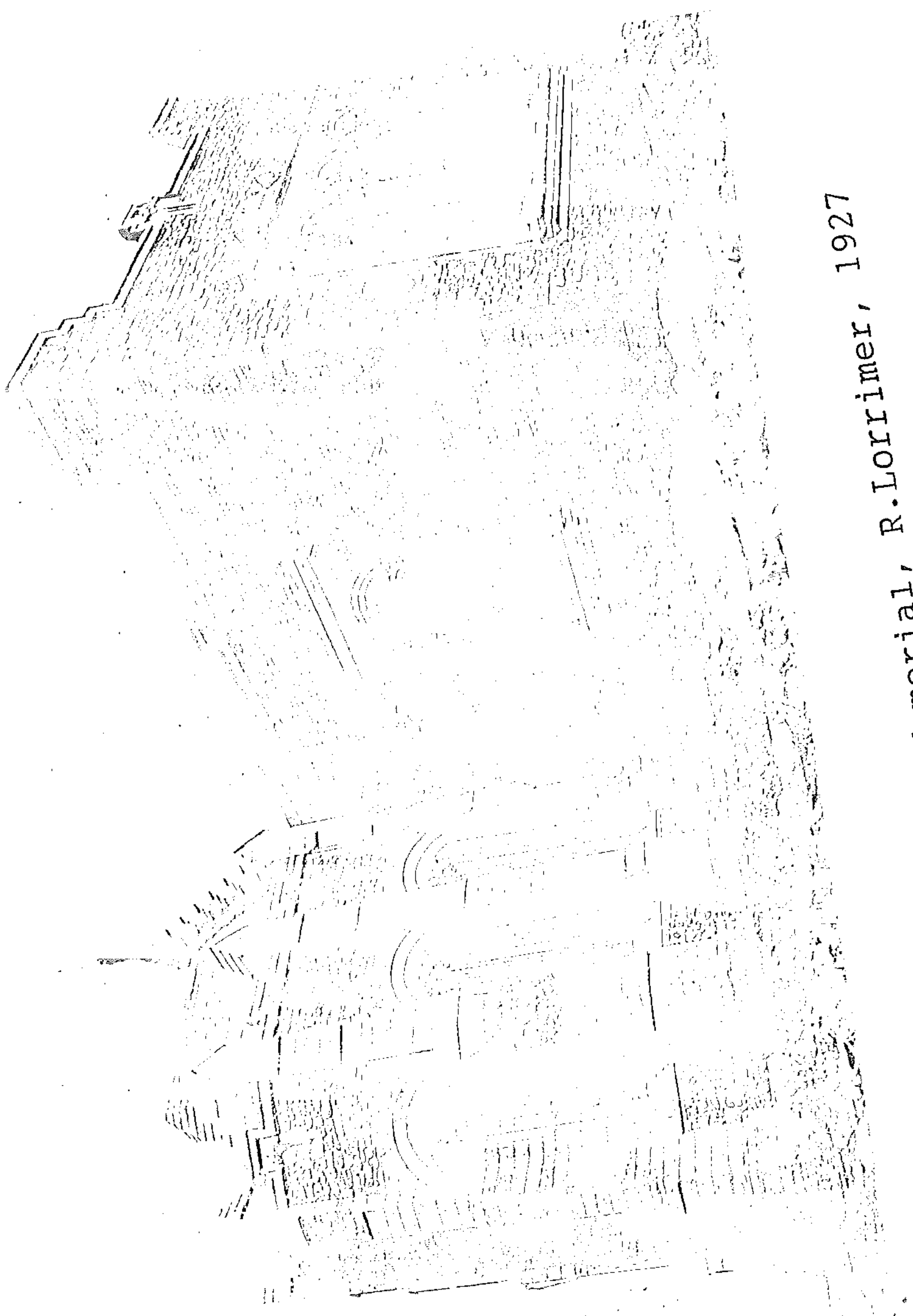




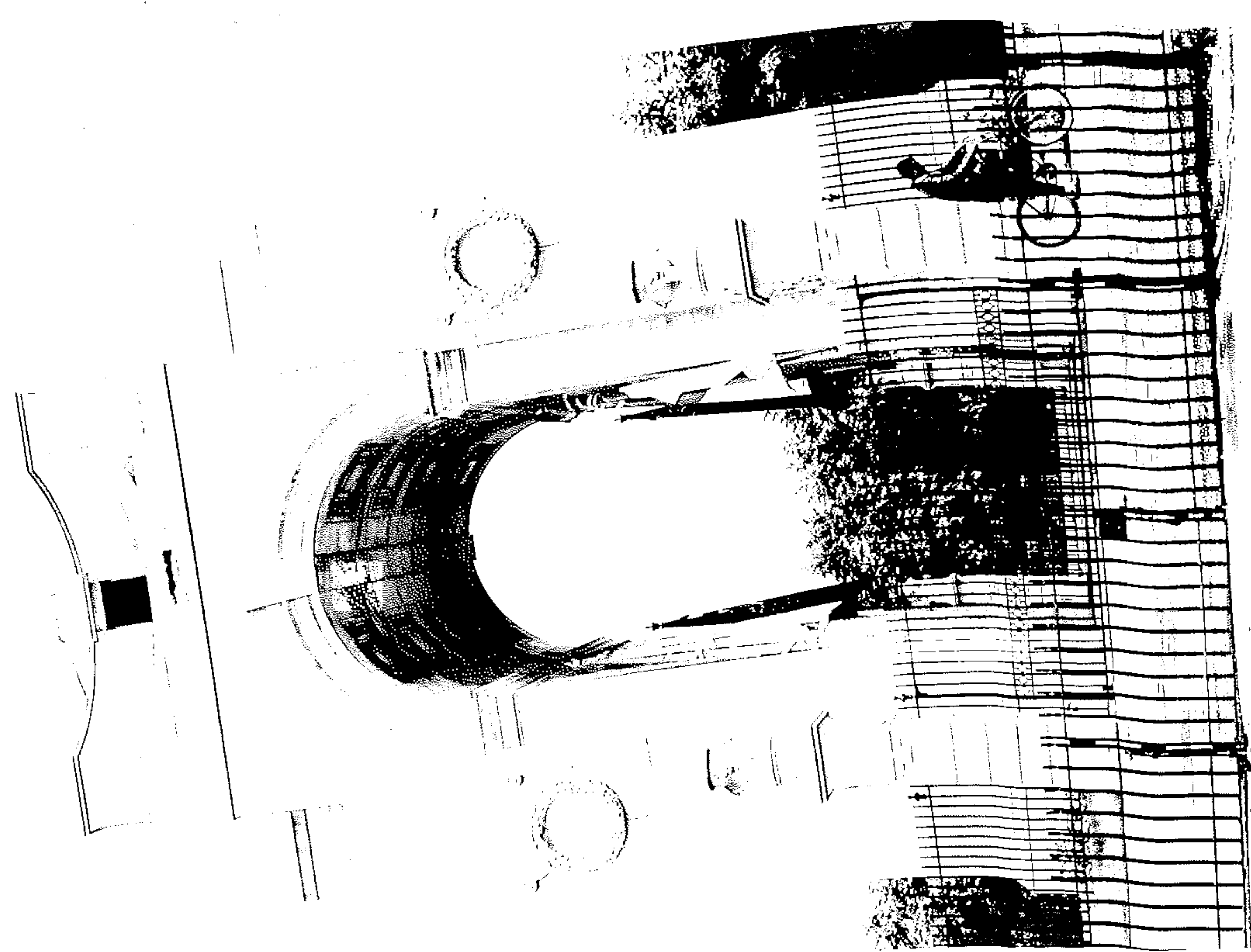
5. Design for shrine in Hyde Park,  
E. Lutyens, 1918



6. Shrine on Islington Green, 1918



8. Scottish National War Memorial, R.Lorrimer, 1927

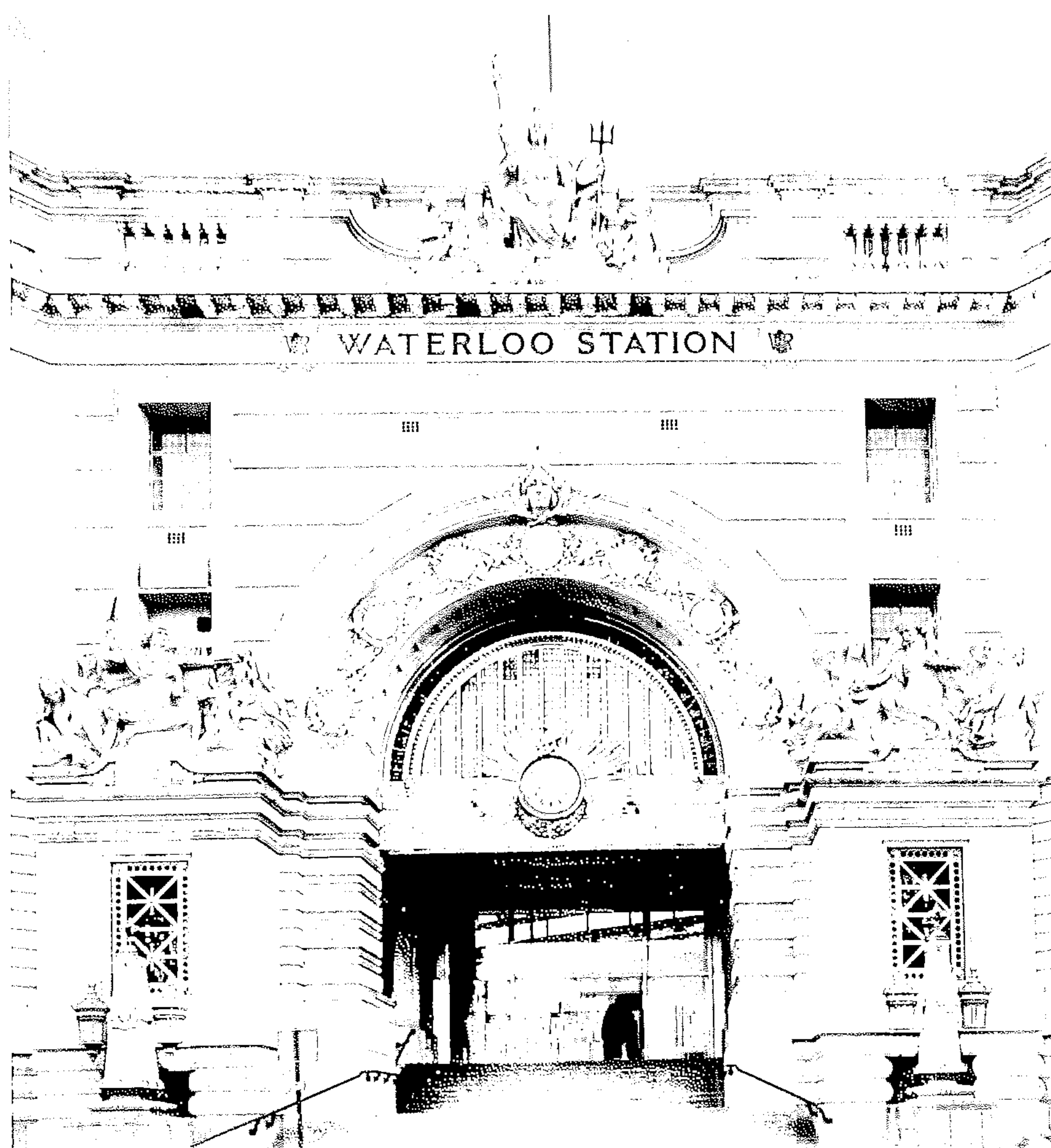


7. Leicester, E.Lutyens, 1925





9. Bedfordshire Regiment, G.P.Allen, 1921



10. Waterloo Station, J.R.Scott, 1922





11. Westfield Village, T.H.Mawson, 1924

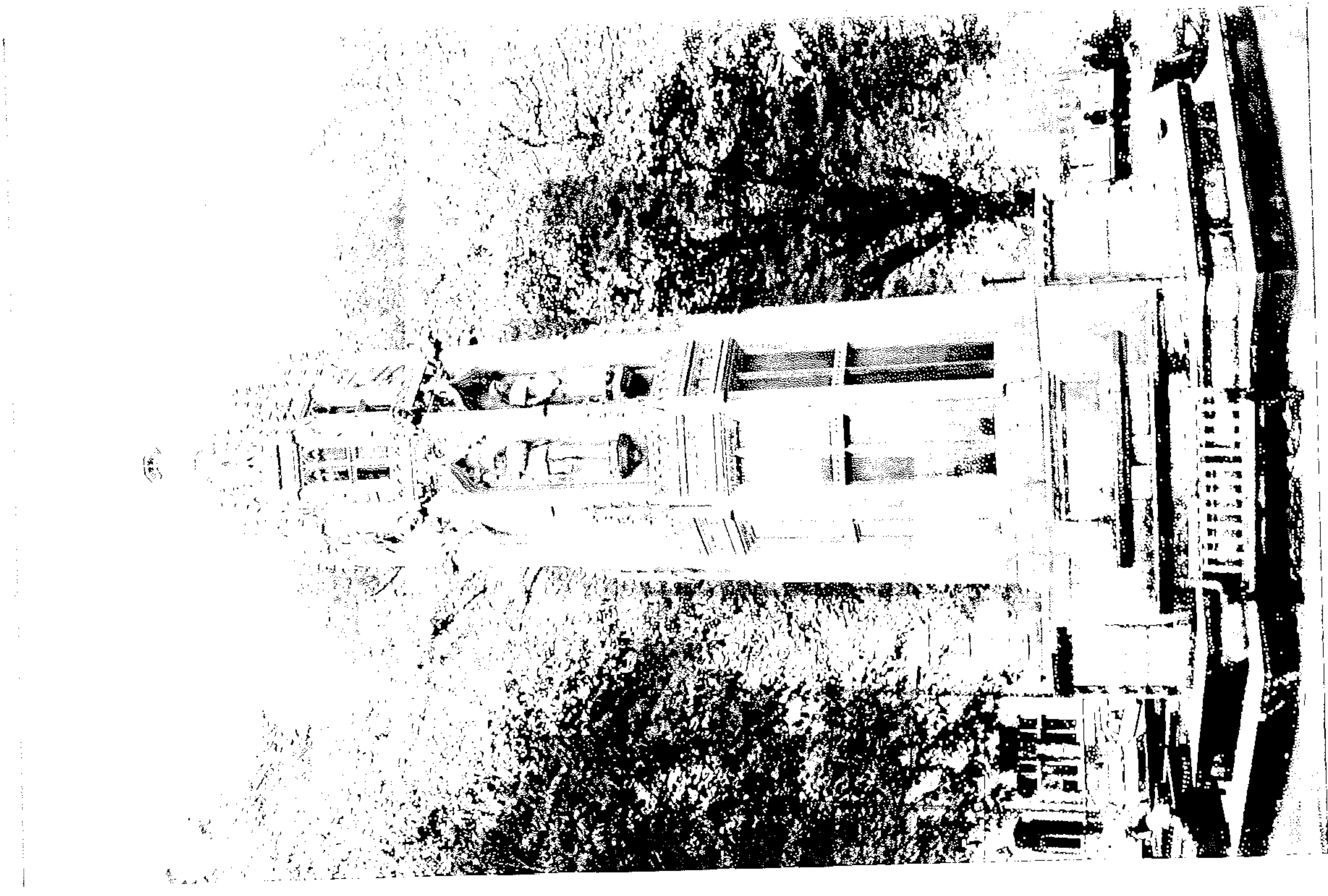


12. Southgate, R.Phillips, 1929  
(Each stone in the cairn represents  
one of the dead)



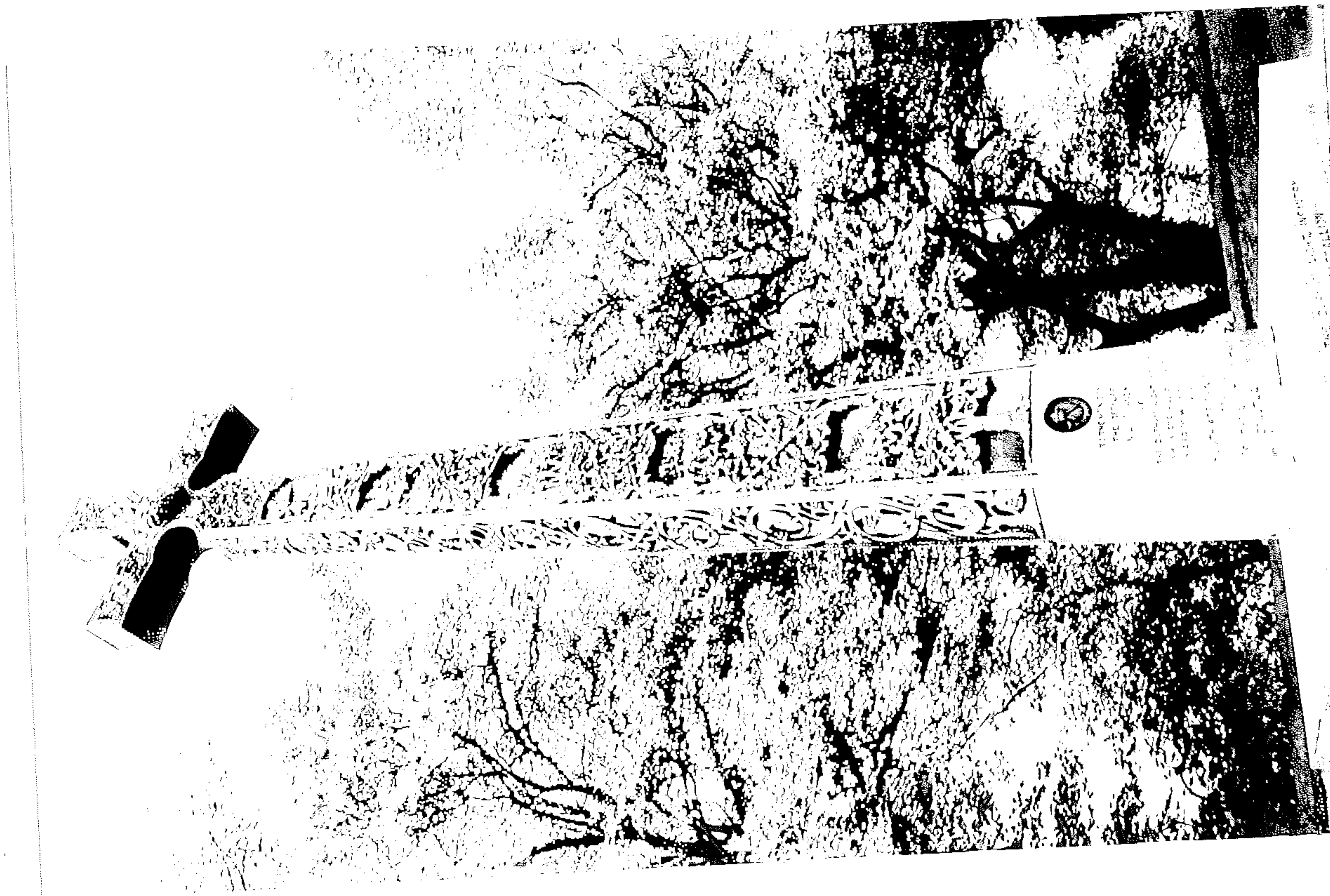


13. Stockport, J.T.Halliday and G.Ledward, 1925



14. Yorkshire Boer War Memorial, G.F.Bodley, 1905



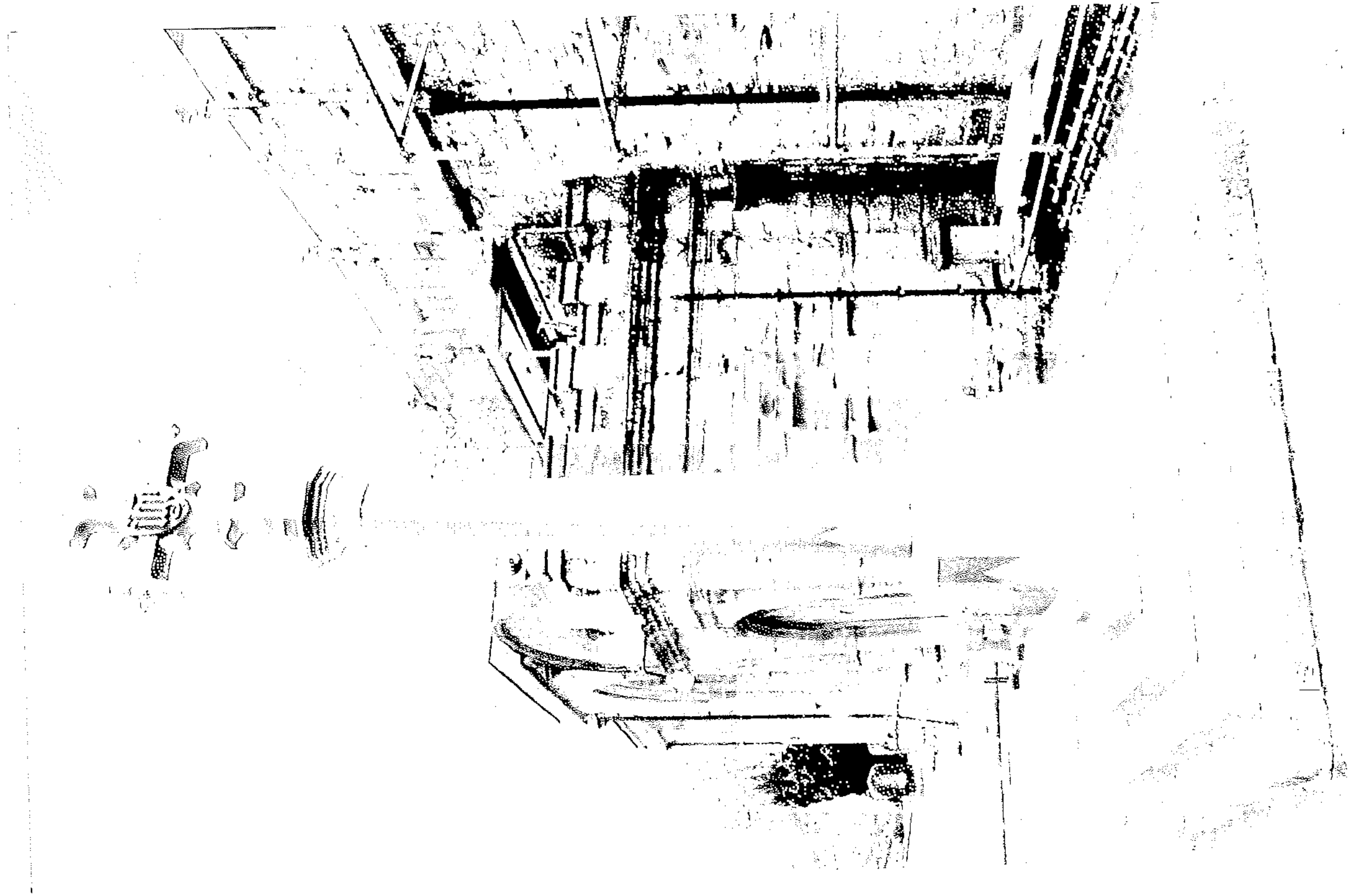


15. Durham Light Infantry, 1905

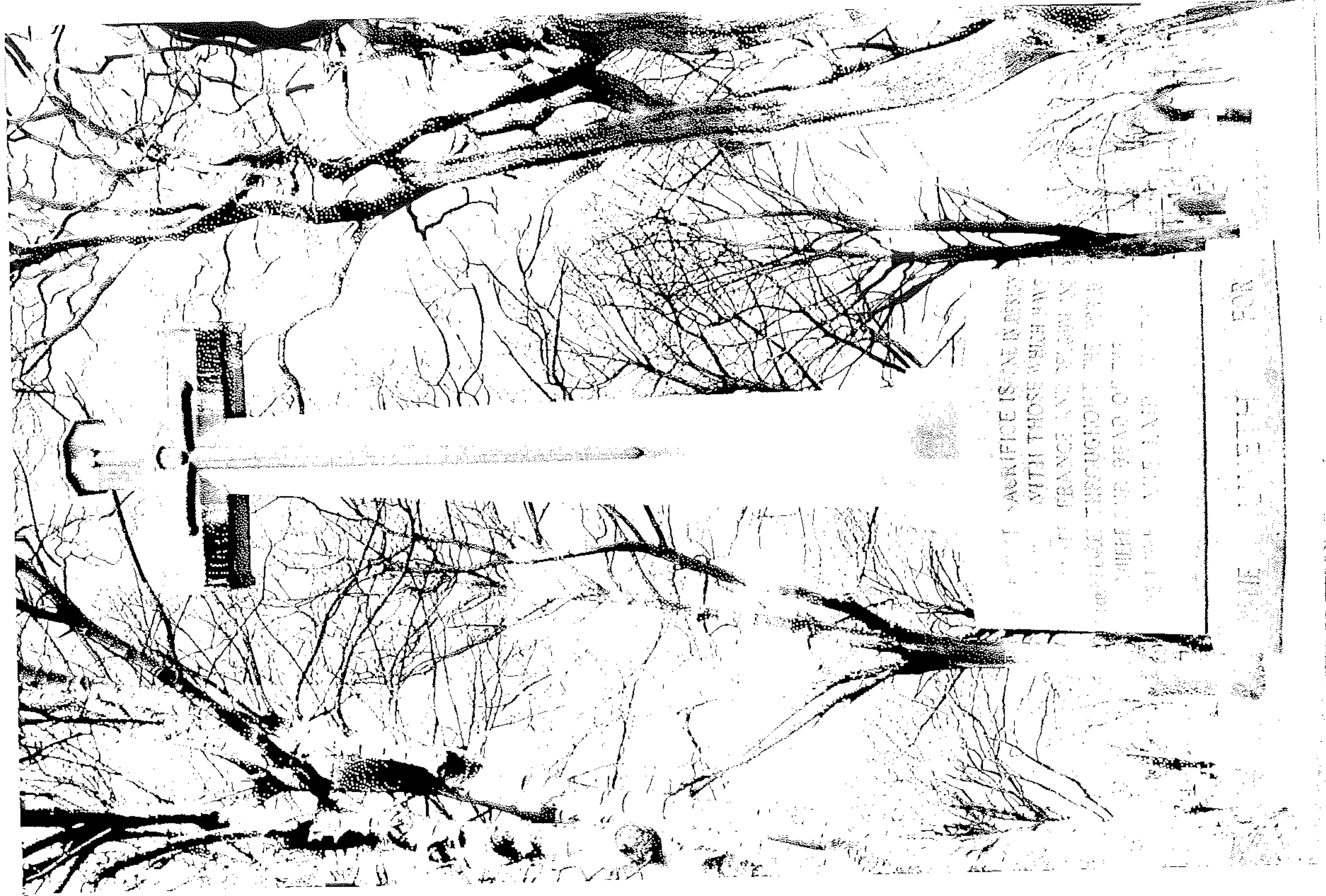


16. 'The Great Sacrifice', J. Clerk, 1914





17. Brancepeth, W.H.Wood, 1921

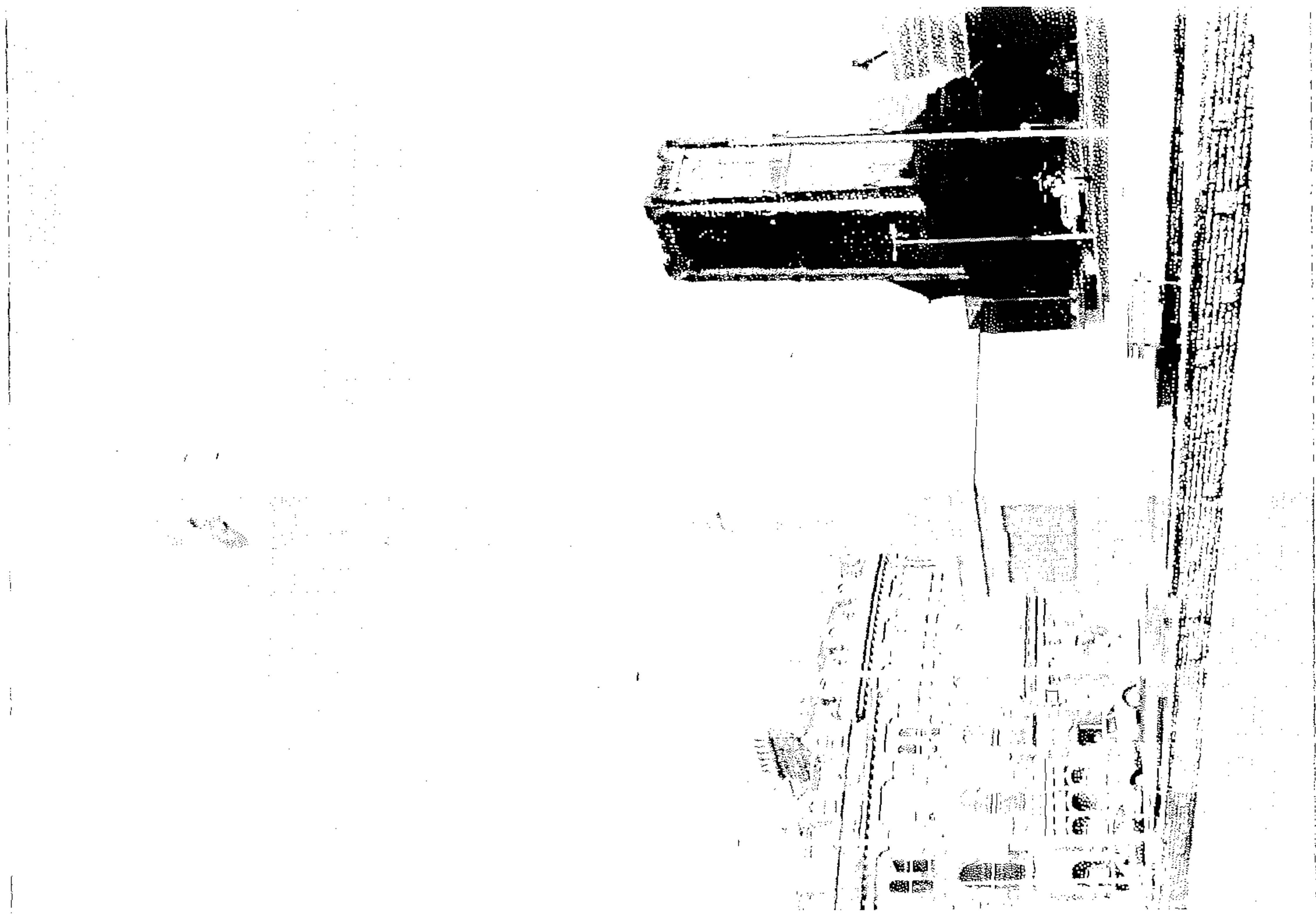


18. Memorial Cross, R.Blomfield, c.1918





19. Memorial Cross, E.Lutyens, c.1918

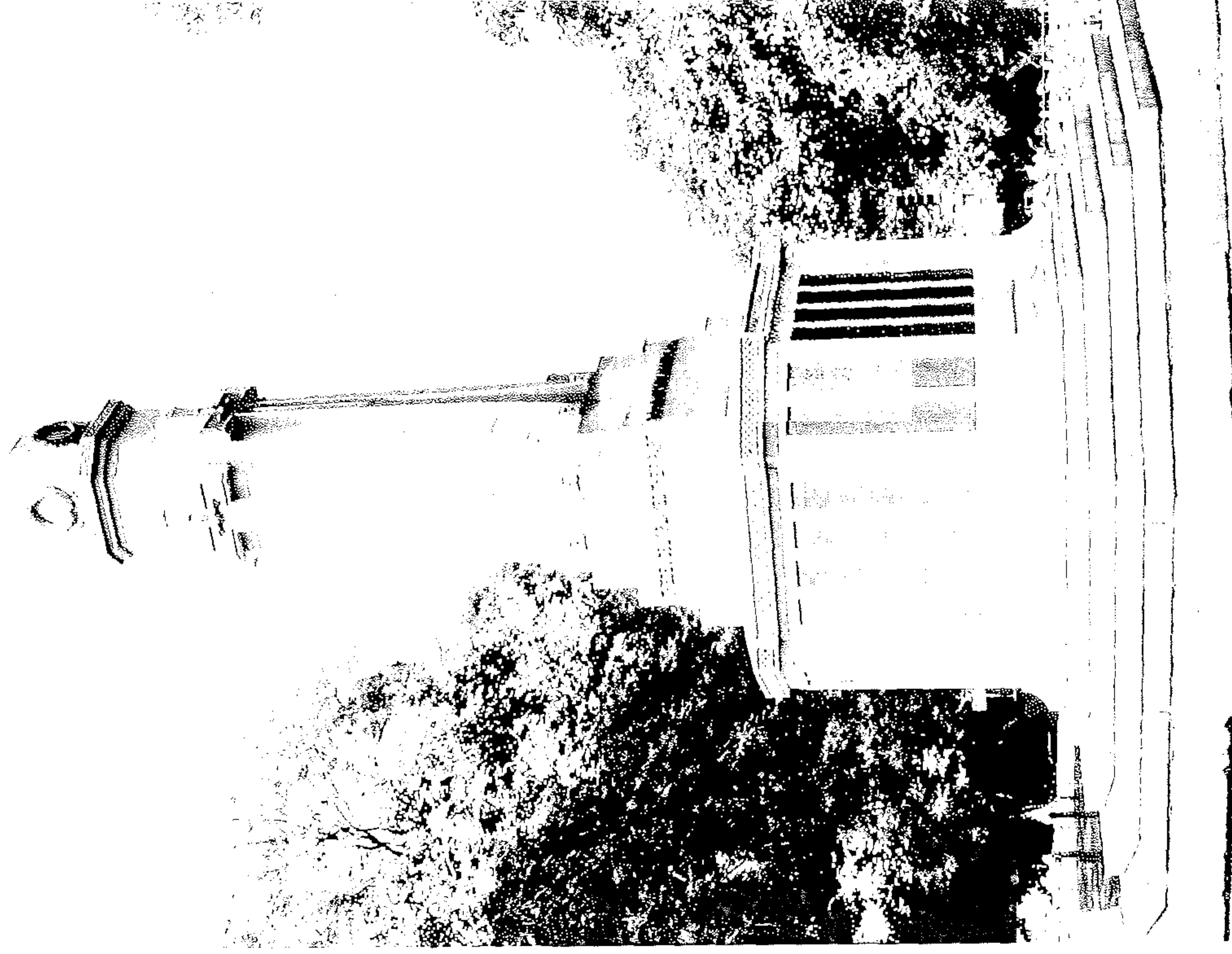


20. Harrogate, J.C.Prestwich, 1923



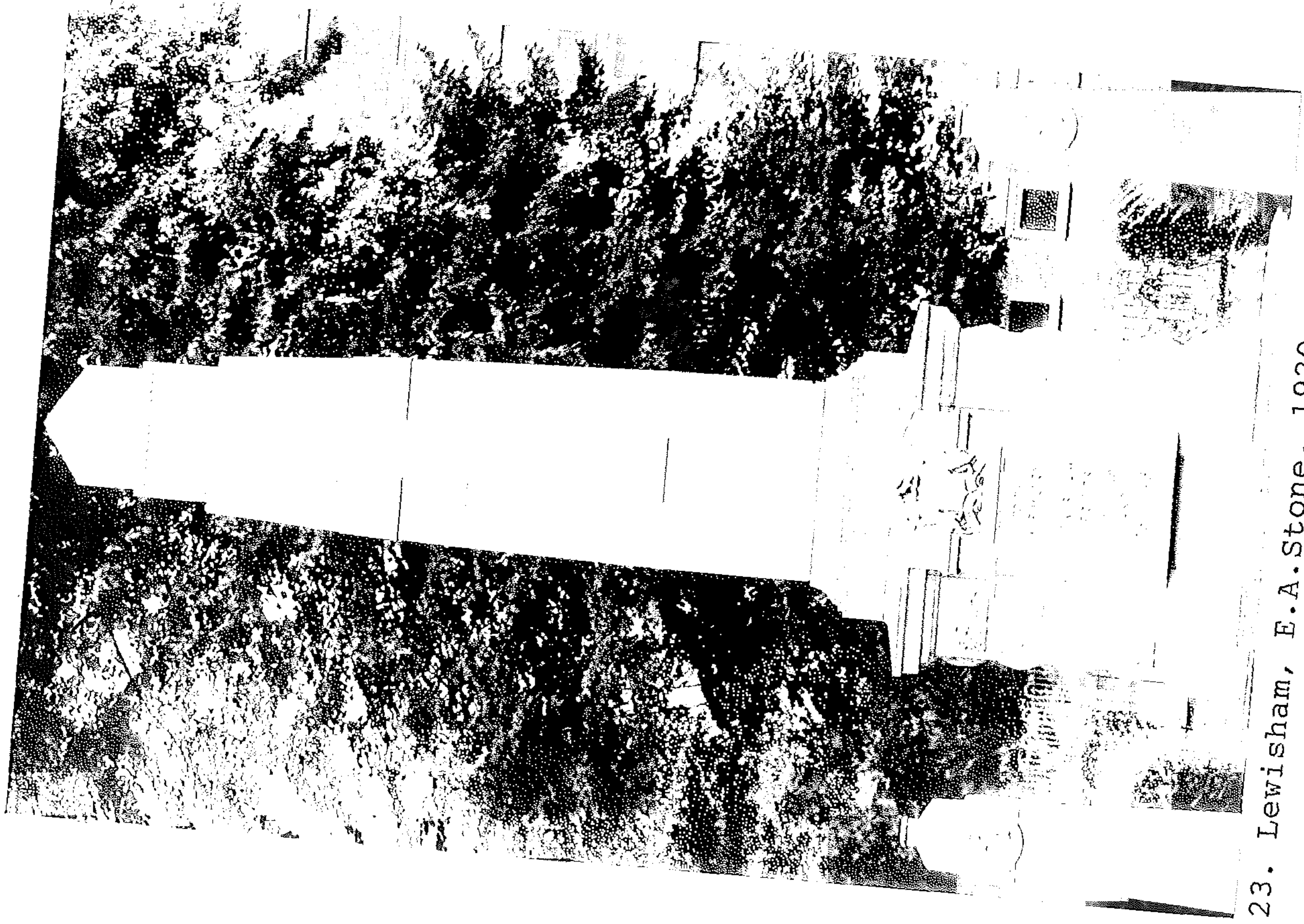


21. LNWR, R.Wynn Owen, 1921

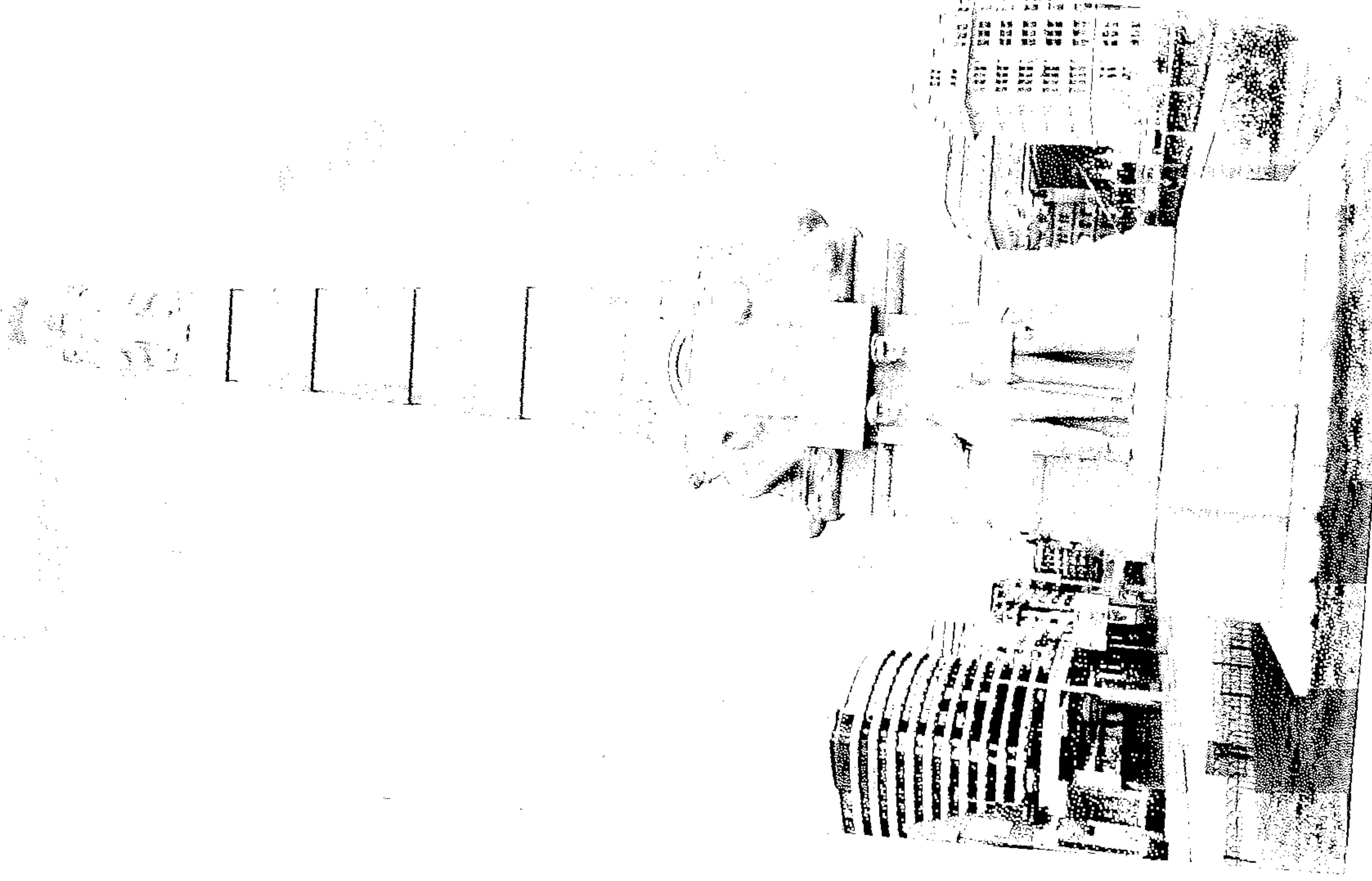


22. Yarmouth, F.R.B.Haward, 1922



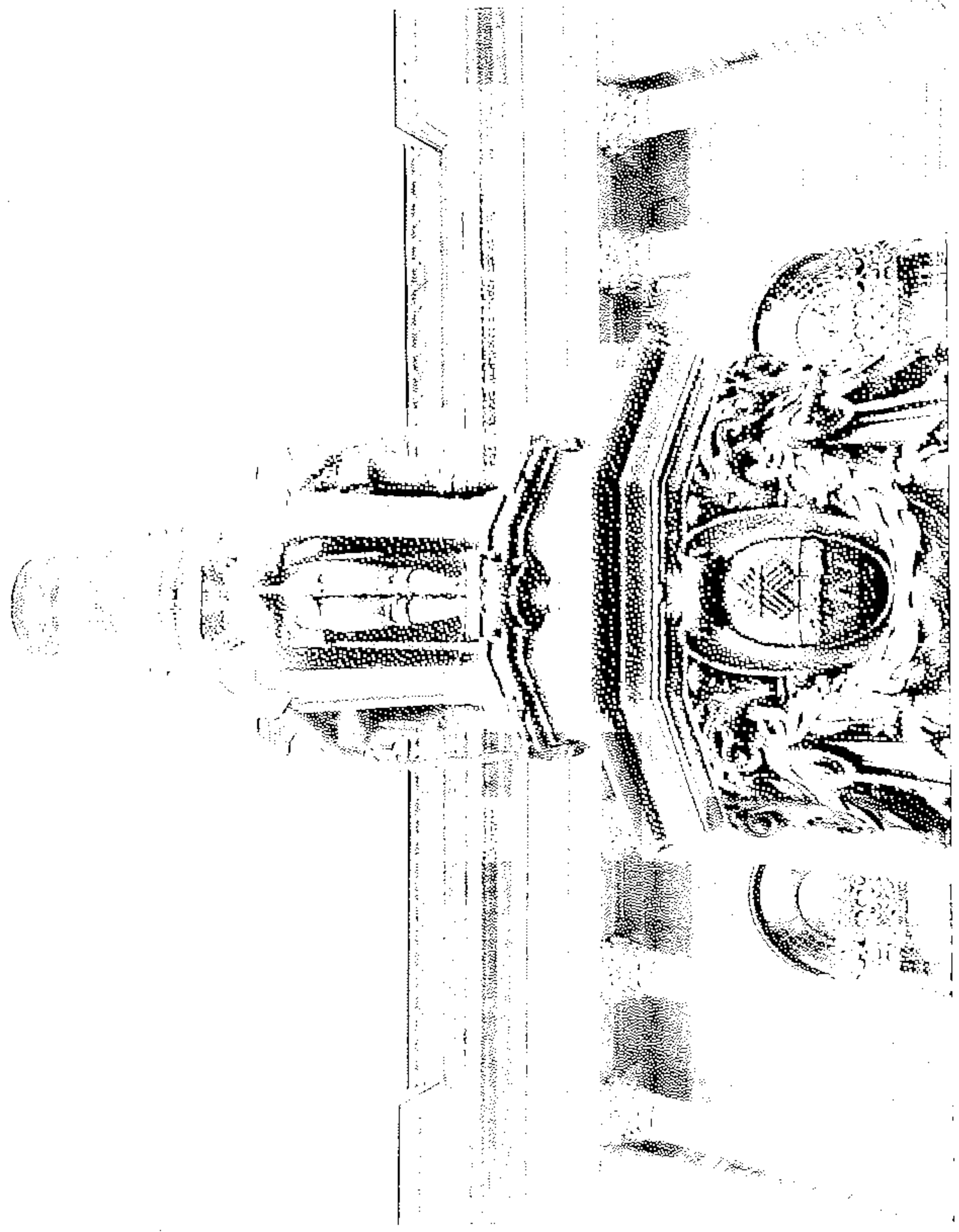


23. Lewisham, E.A.Stone, 1920

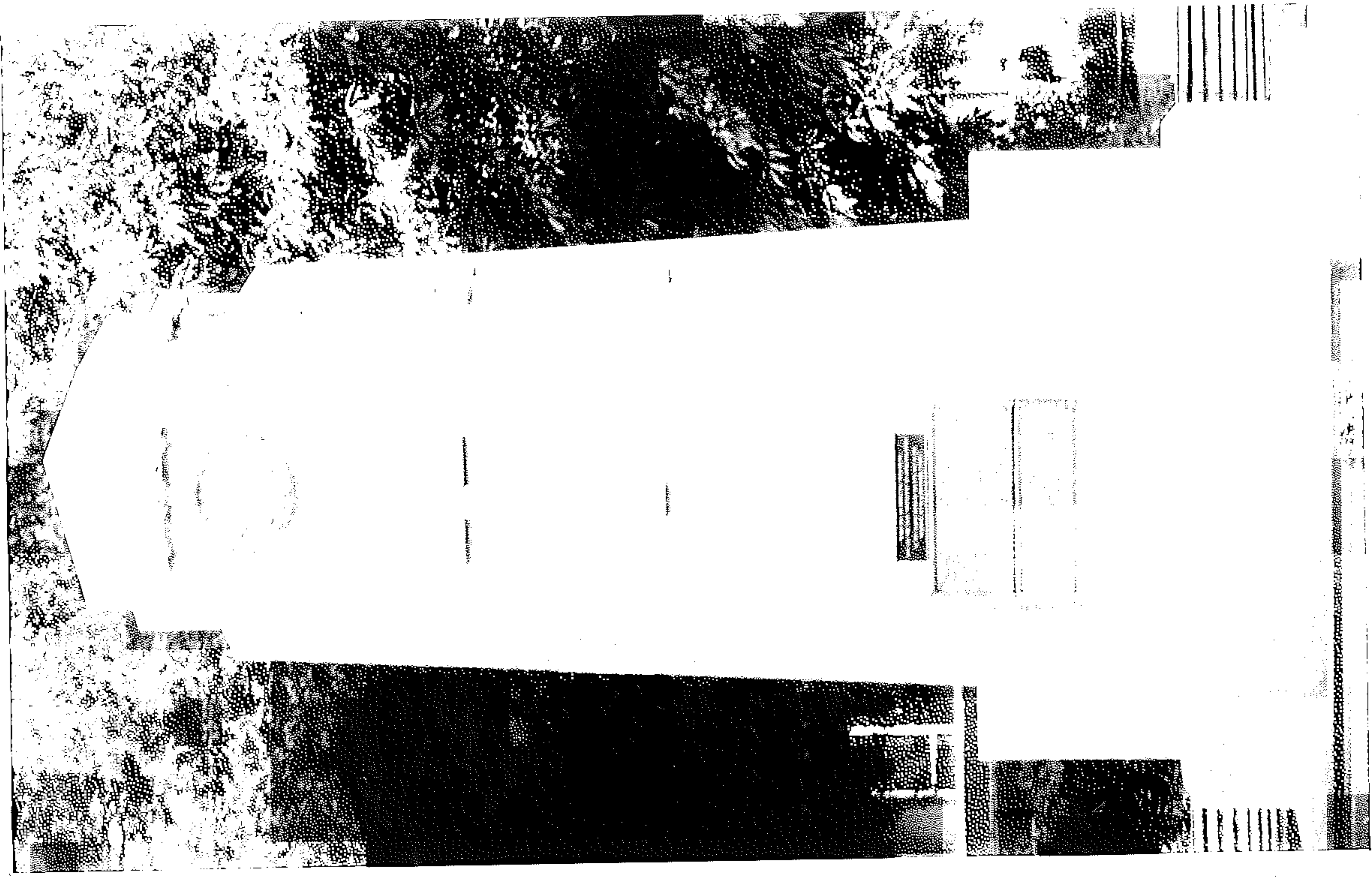


24. Engine Room Heroes, W.Goscombe John  
1916



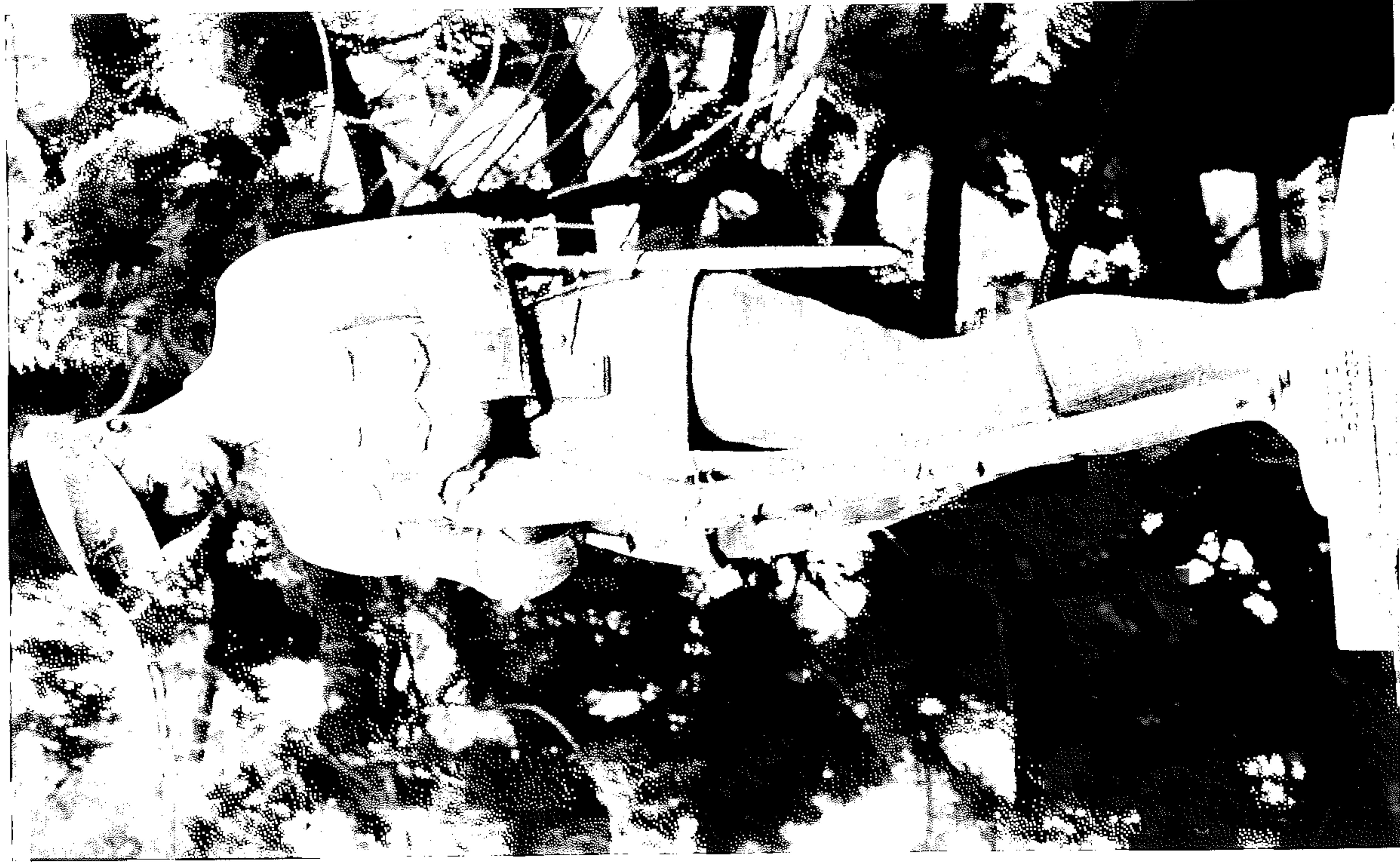


25. Sheffield, C. Carus Wilson, 1925

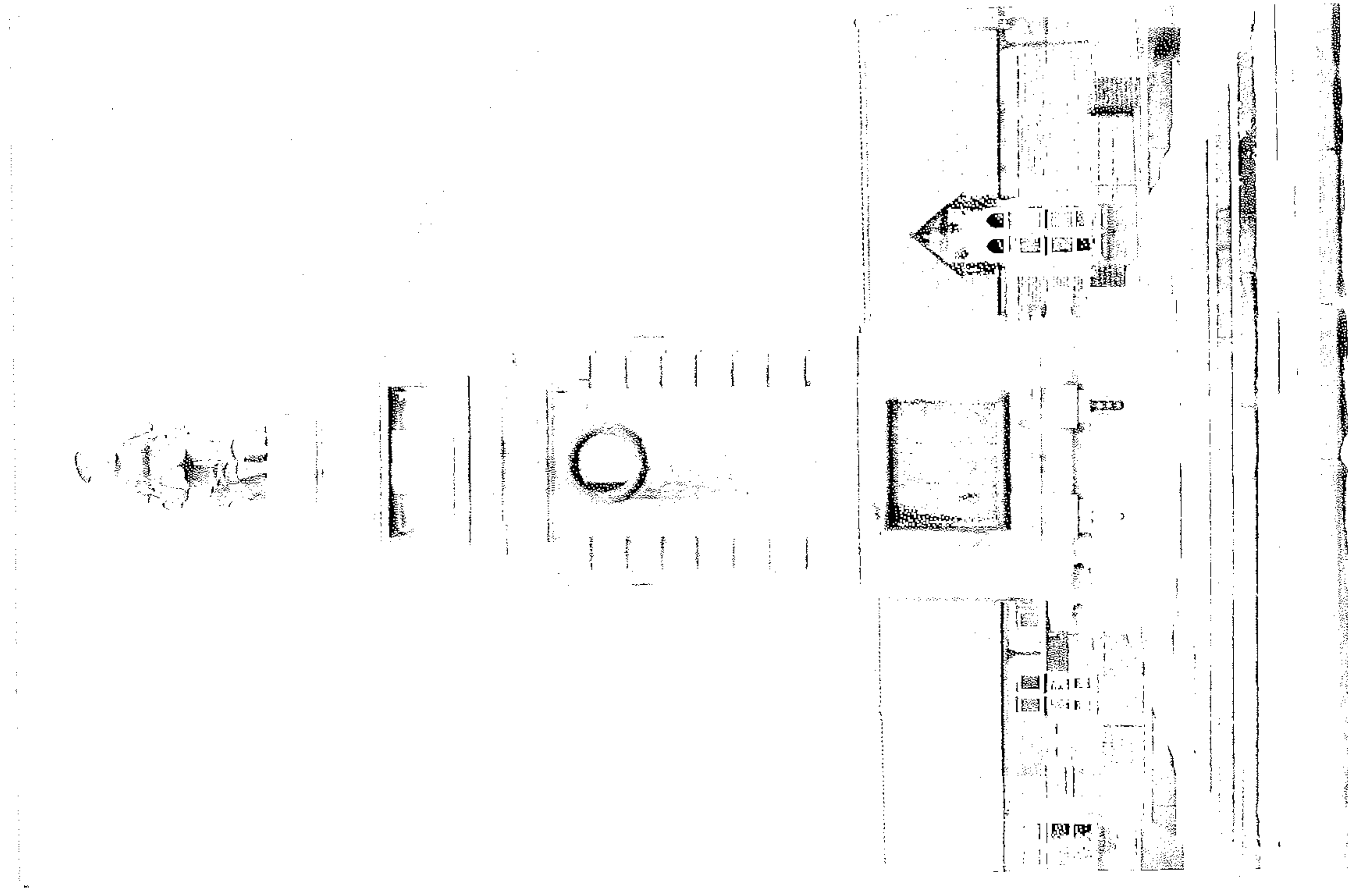


26. Wakefield, P.D. Stanham, 1922



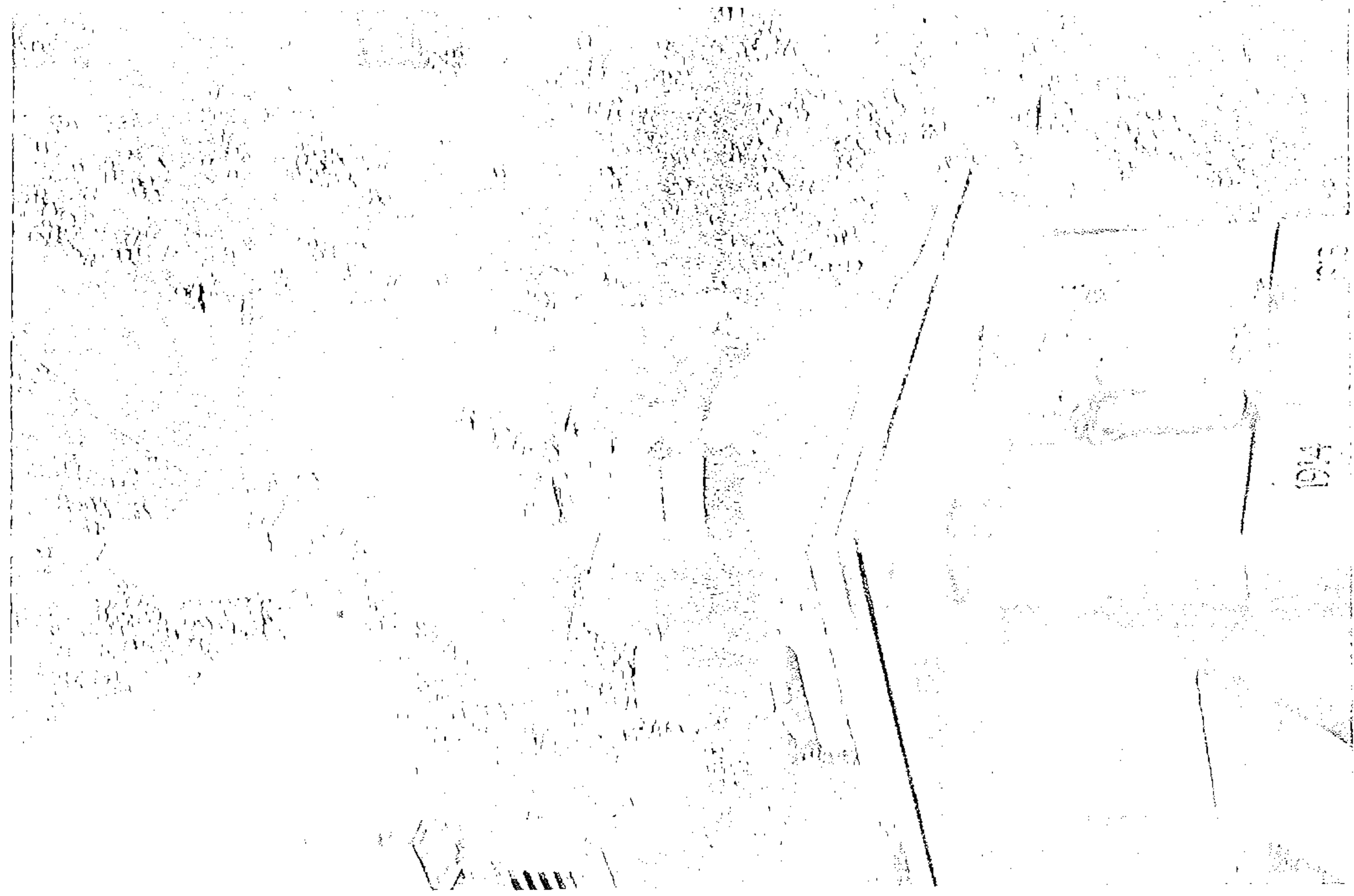


27. Llandrindod Wells, B.Lloyd, 1922

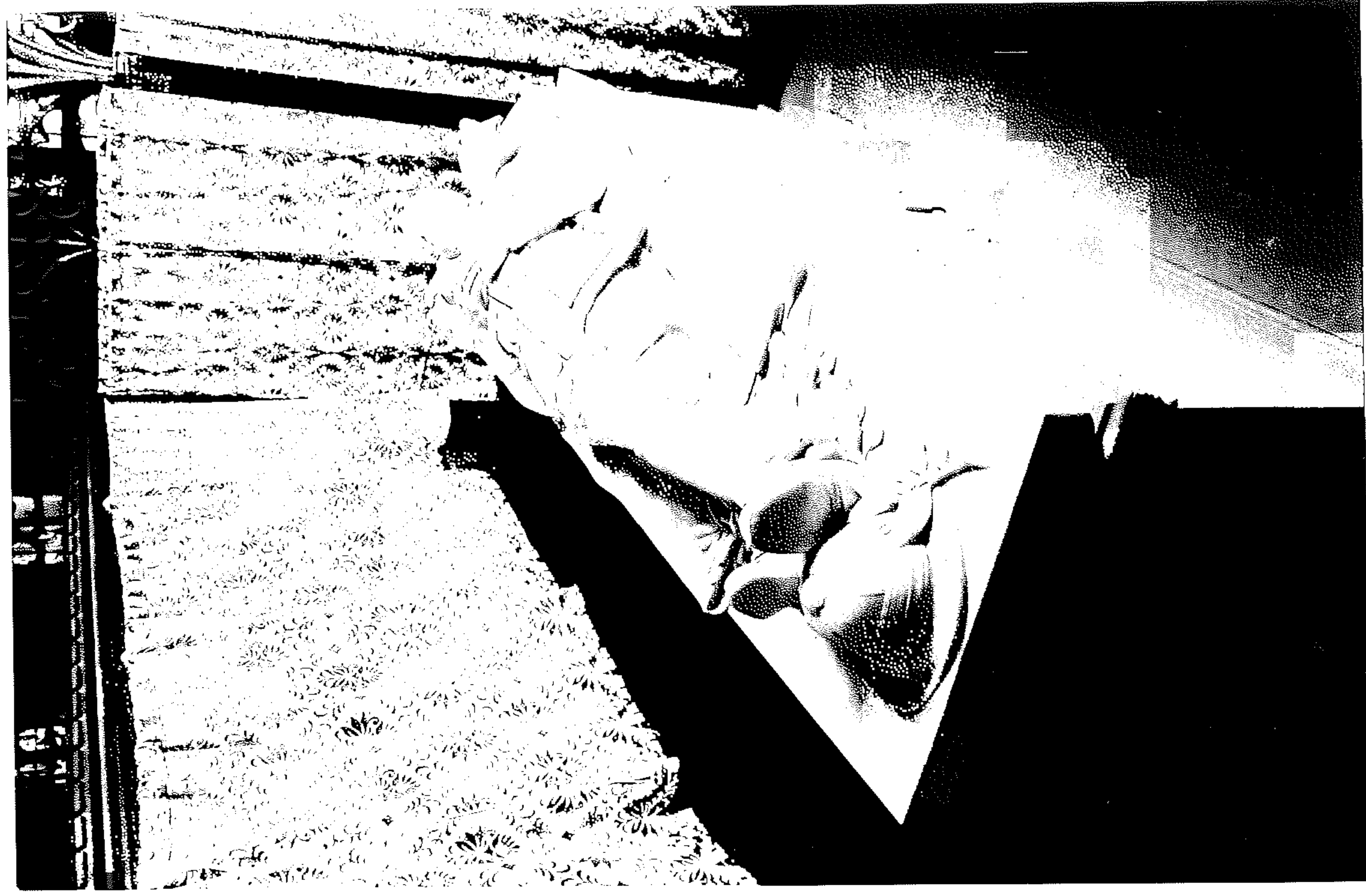


28. Pudsey, W.Brierley, 1922

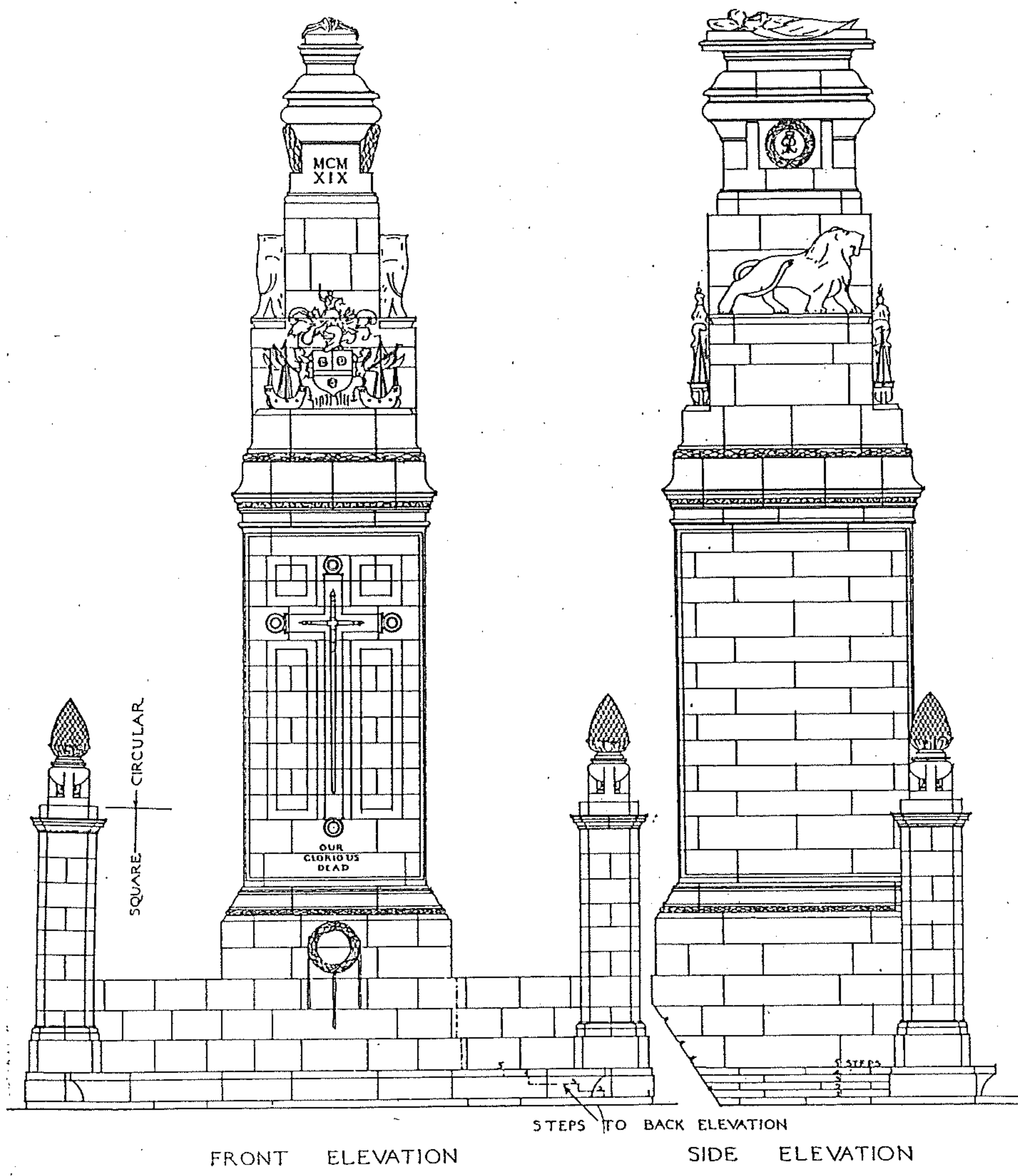




29. Stalybridge, F.V.Blundstone, 1921

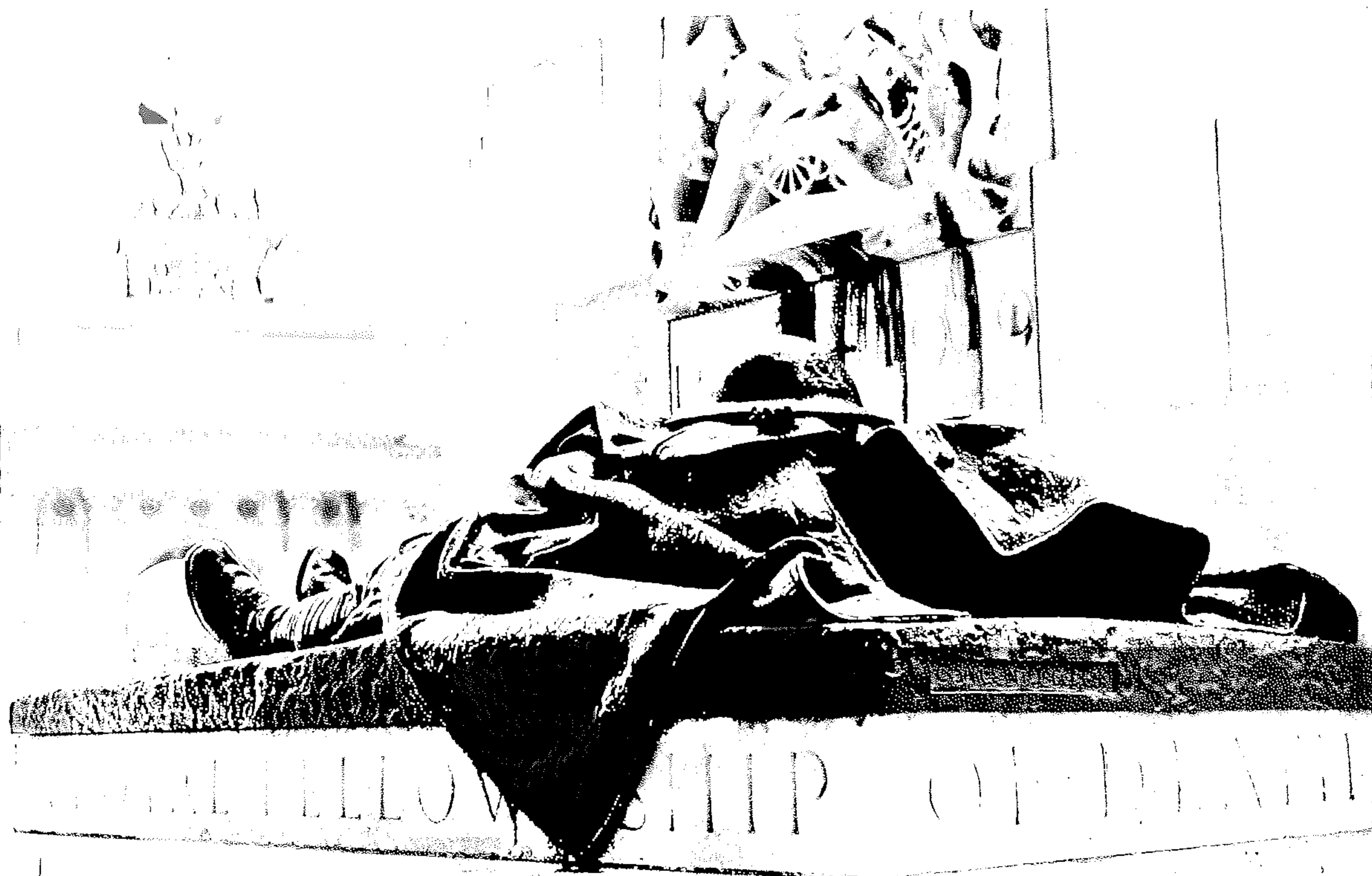


30. Mewburn Memorial, T.Clapperton

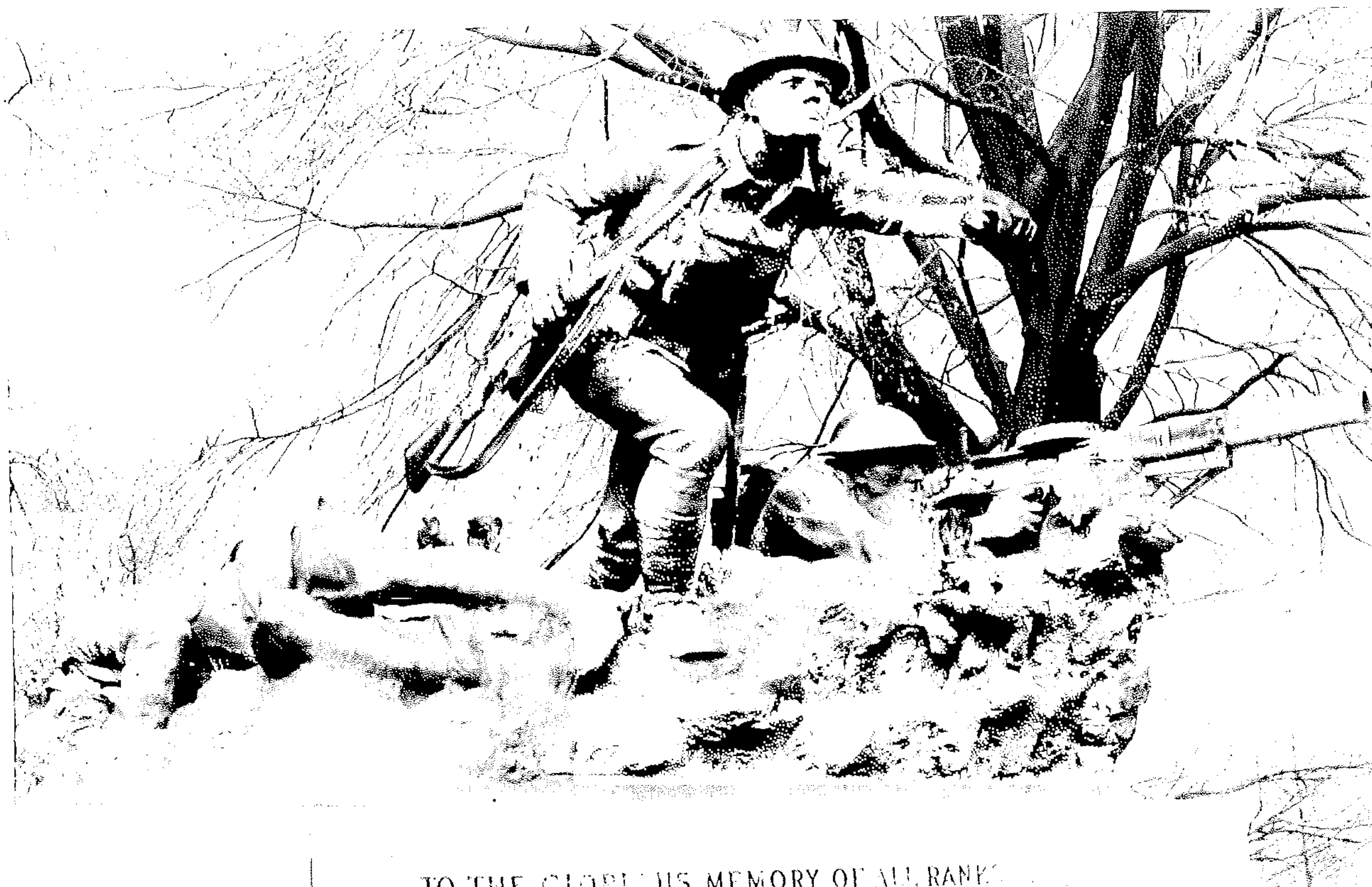


31. Southampton, E.Lutyens, 1920



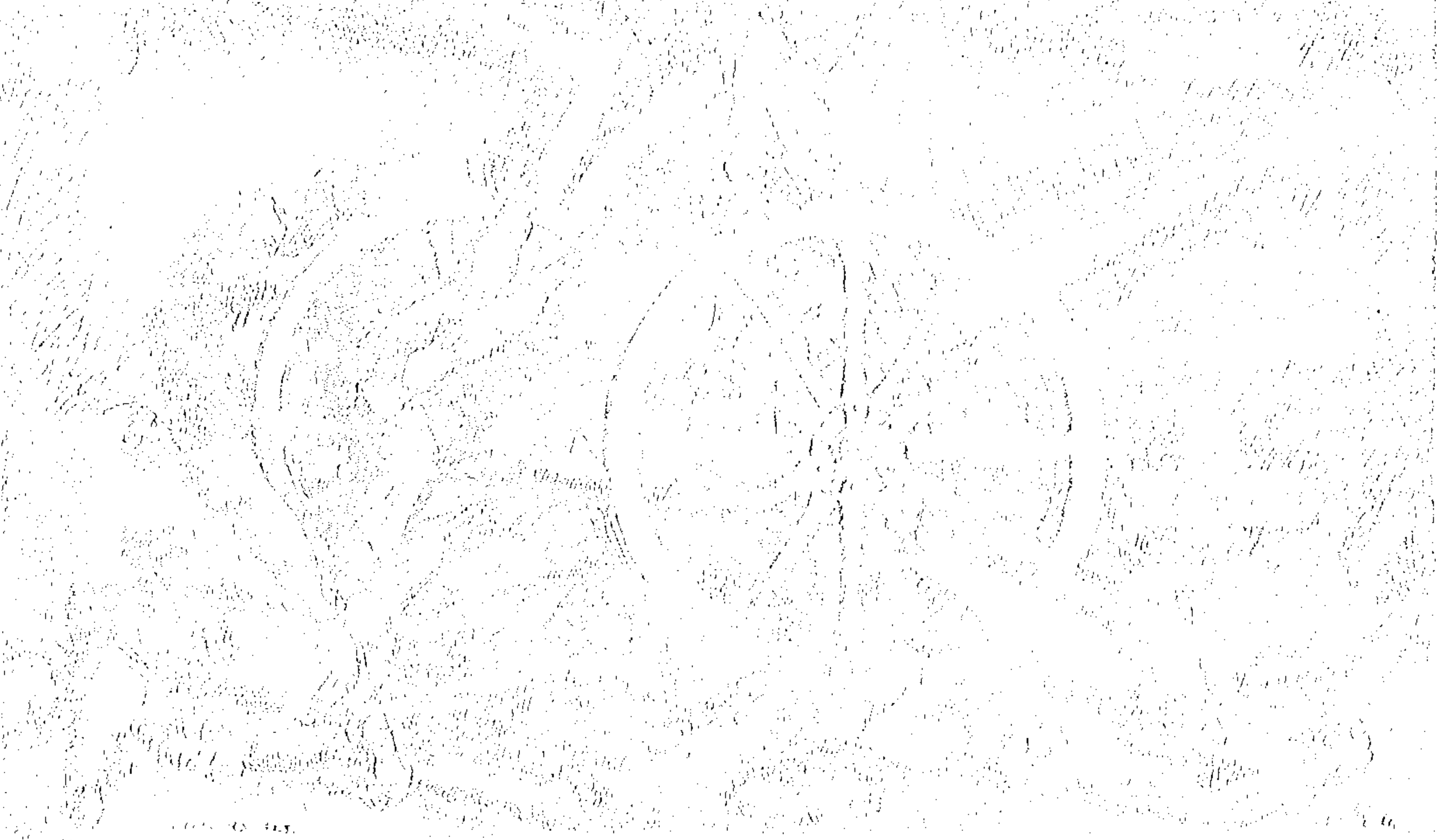


32. Royal Artillery, C.S.Jagger, 1925, detail



33. Cameronians, P.Lindsay Clarke, 1924

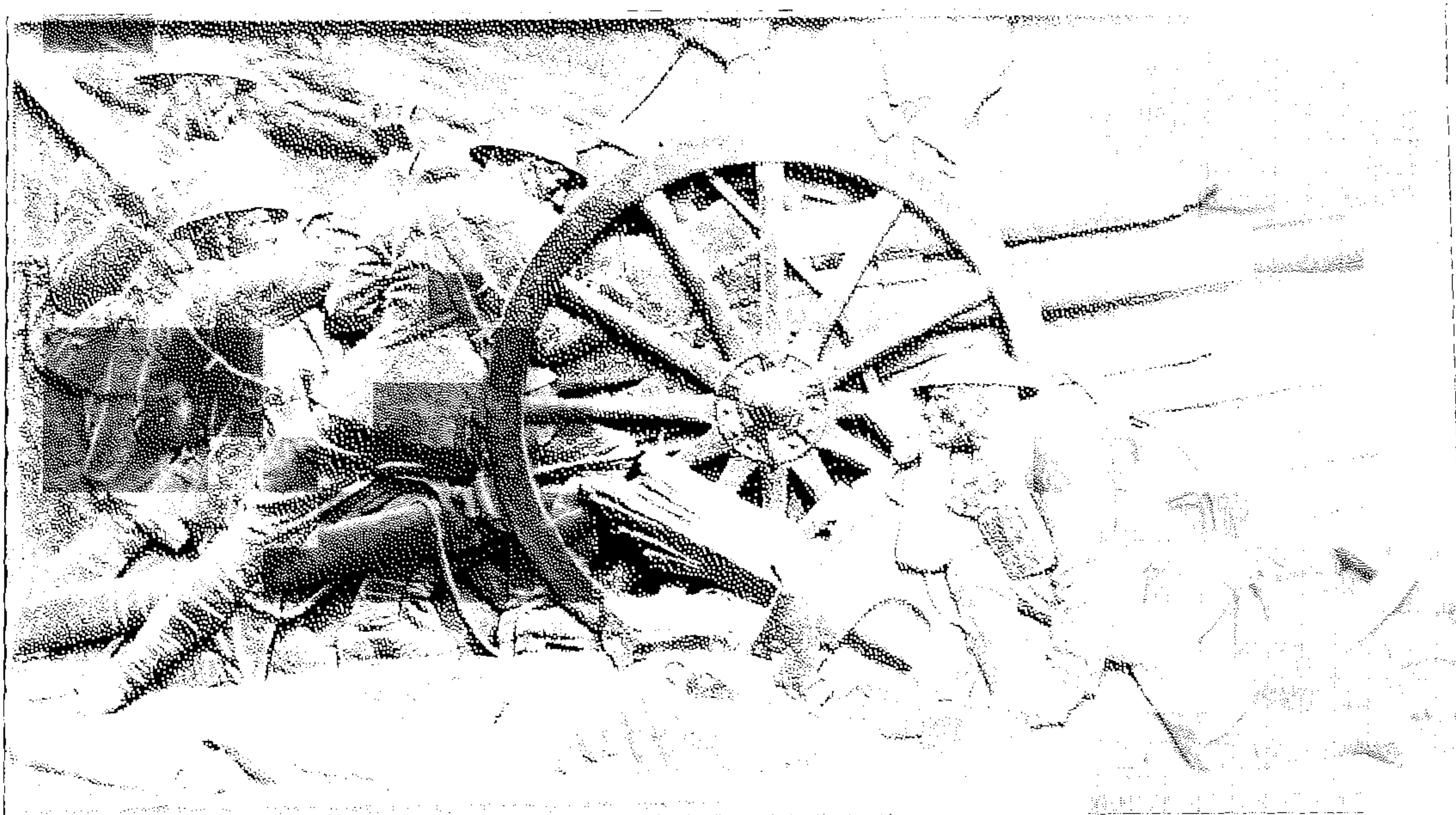




34. Study for relief on Guards' Memorial, G.Ledward, 1923

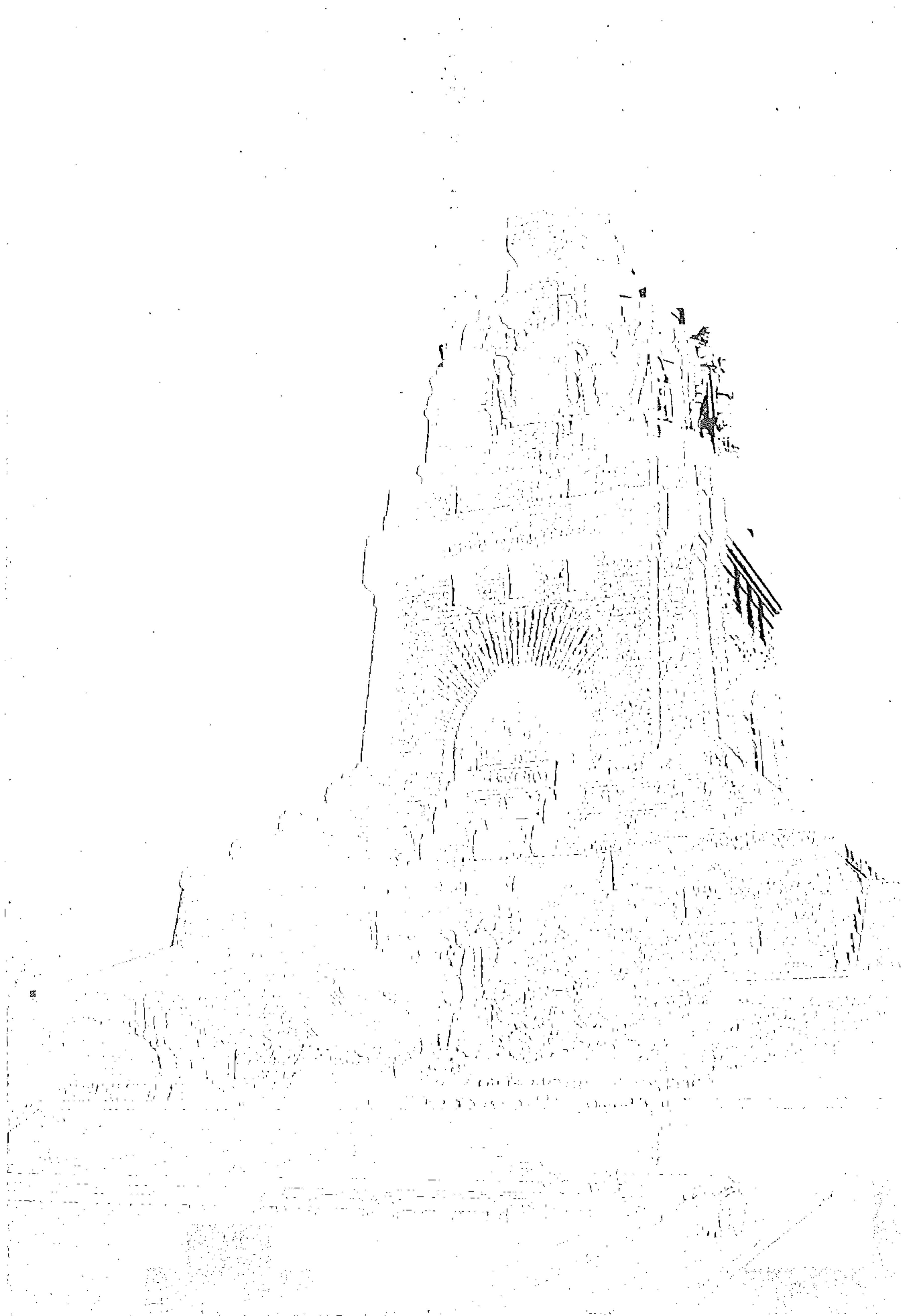


35. Ledward at work on Guards' Memorial relief



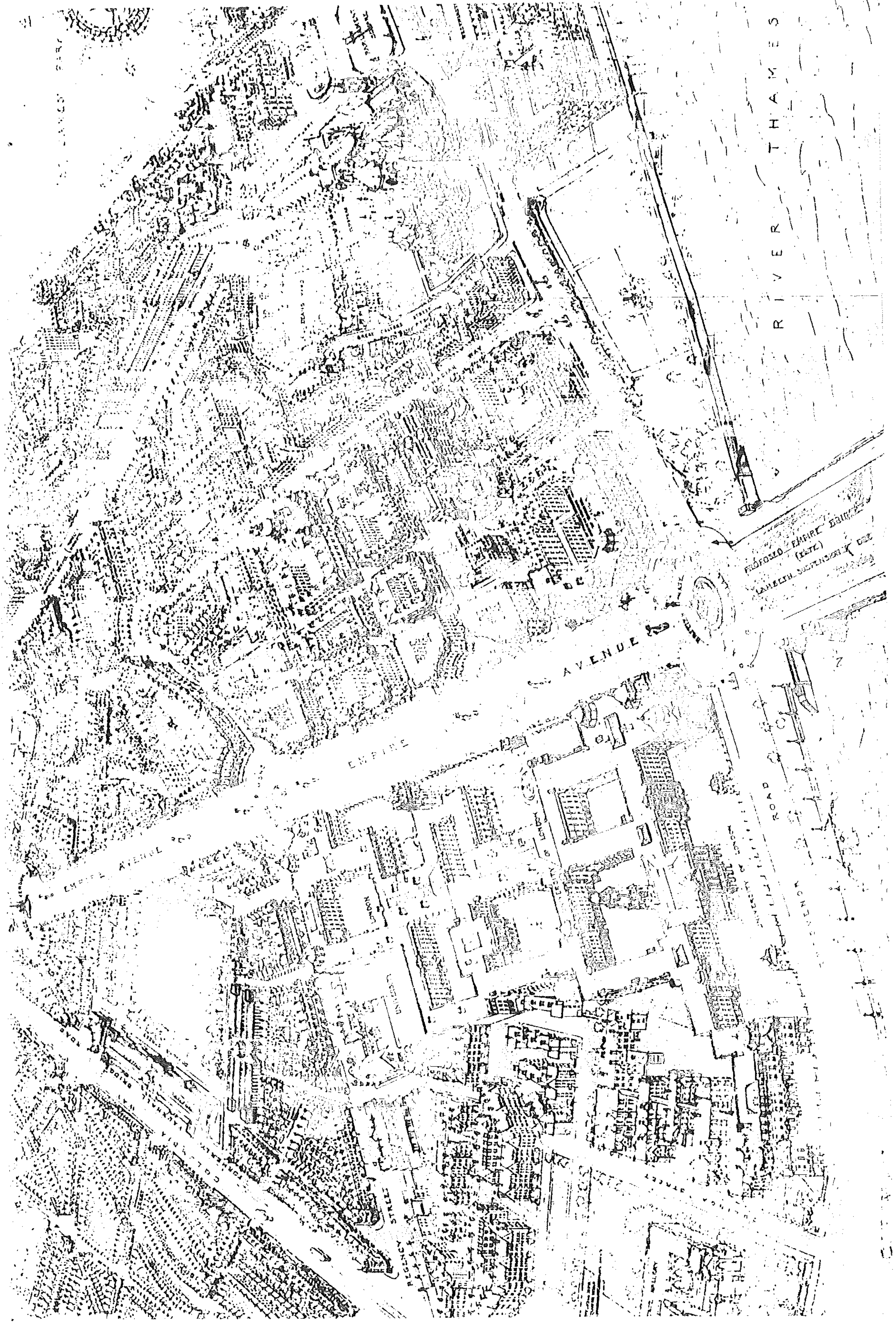
36. Guards' Memorial relief as executed





37. Monument to the Battle of the Nations  
B.Schmitz, 1913



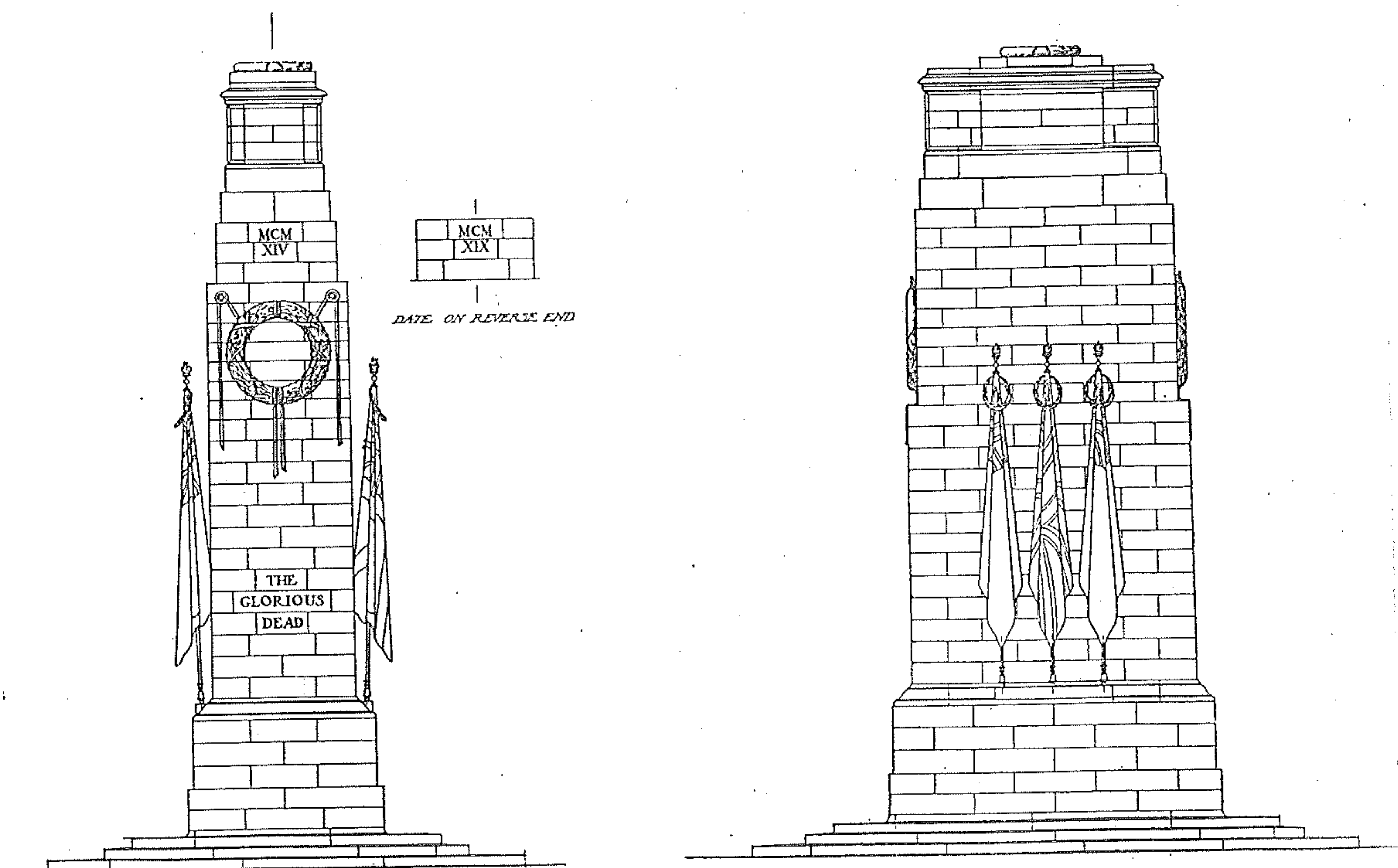


38. Plan for Westminister, C.J.Pawley, 1918

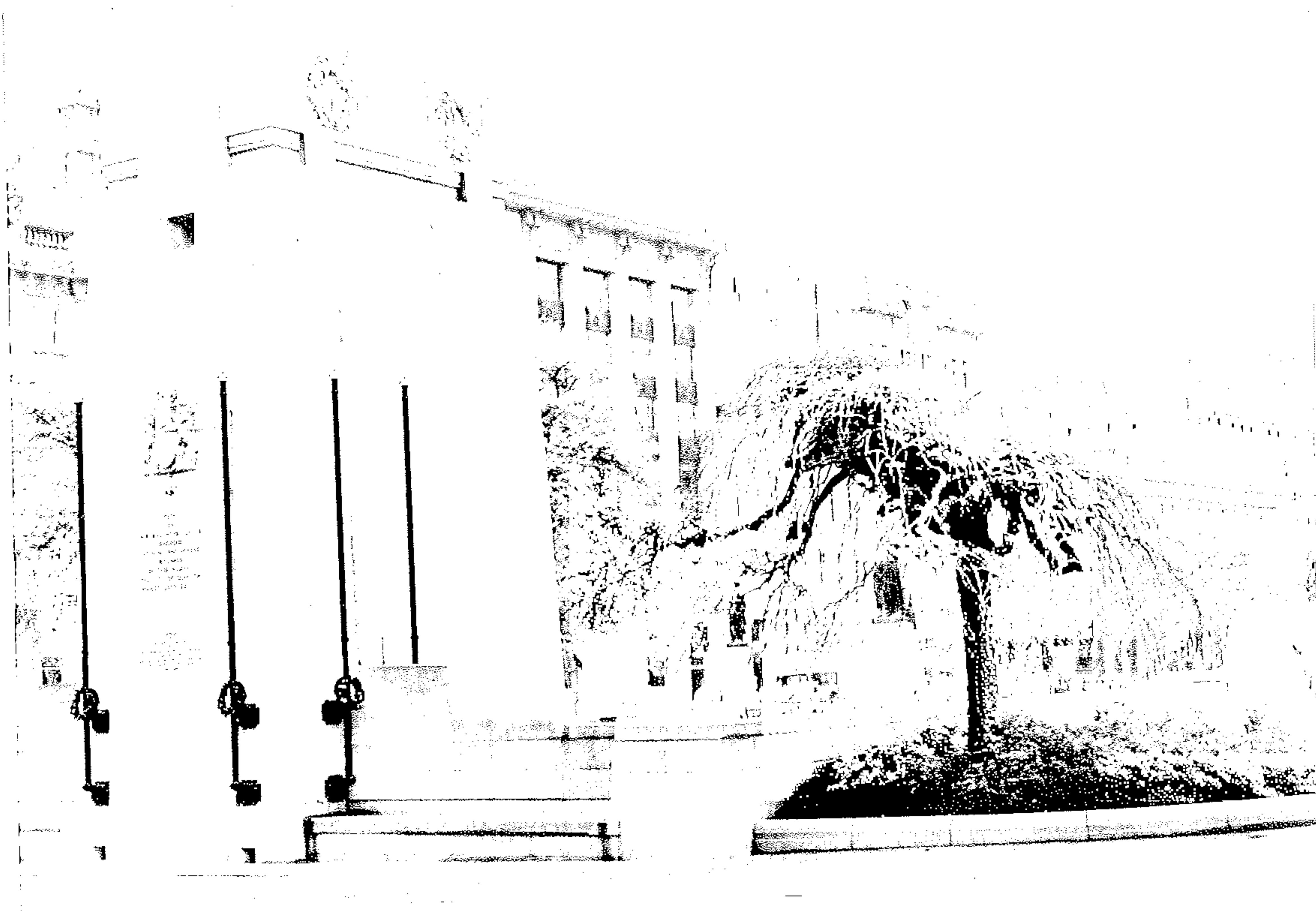




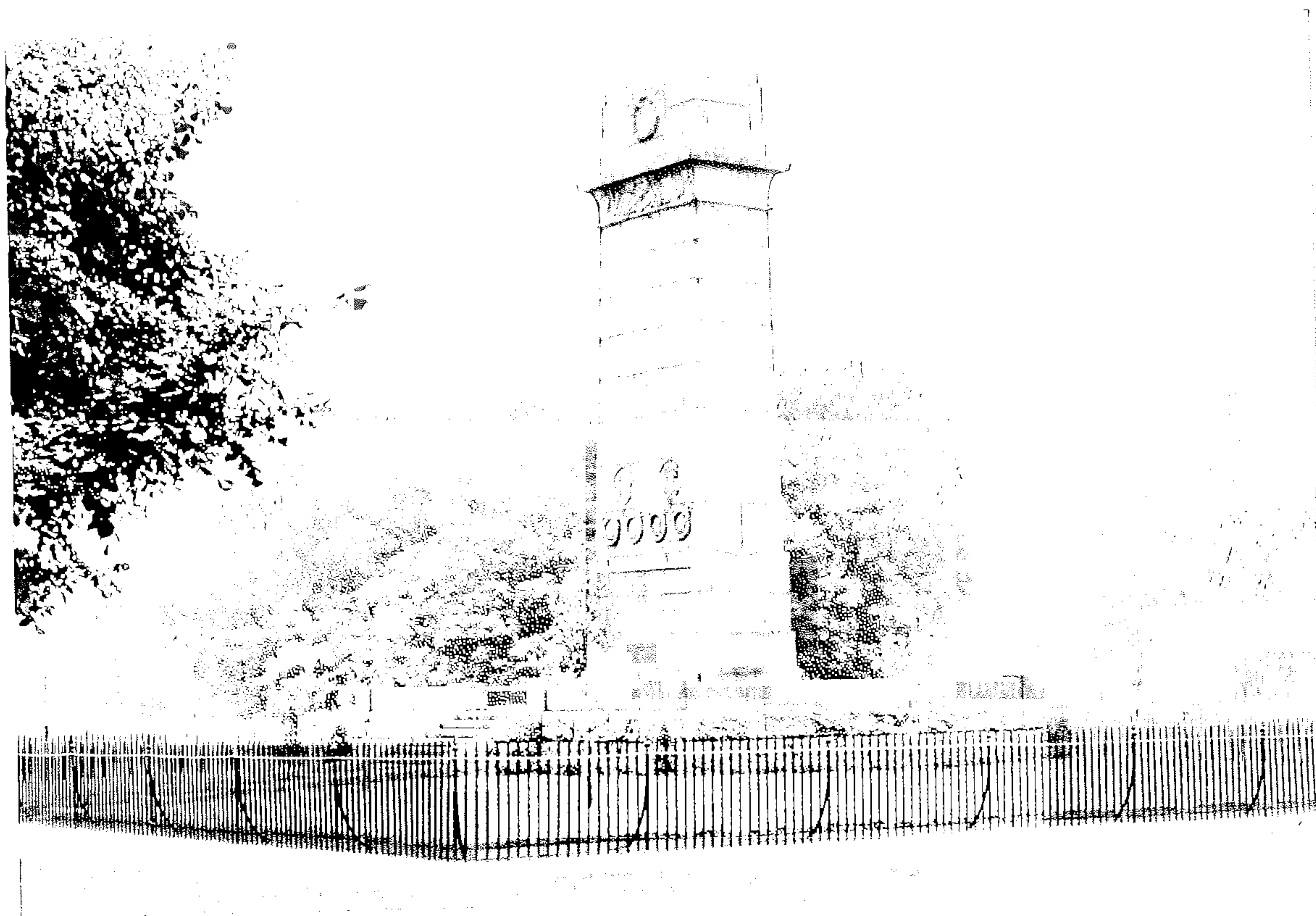
39. The temporary Cenotaph, 19 July 1919



40. The permanent Cenotaph, E.Lutyens, 1920

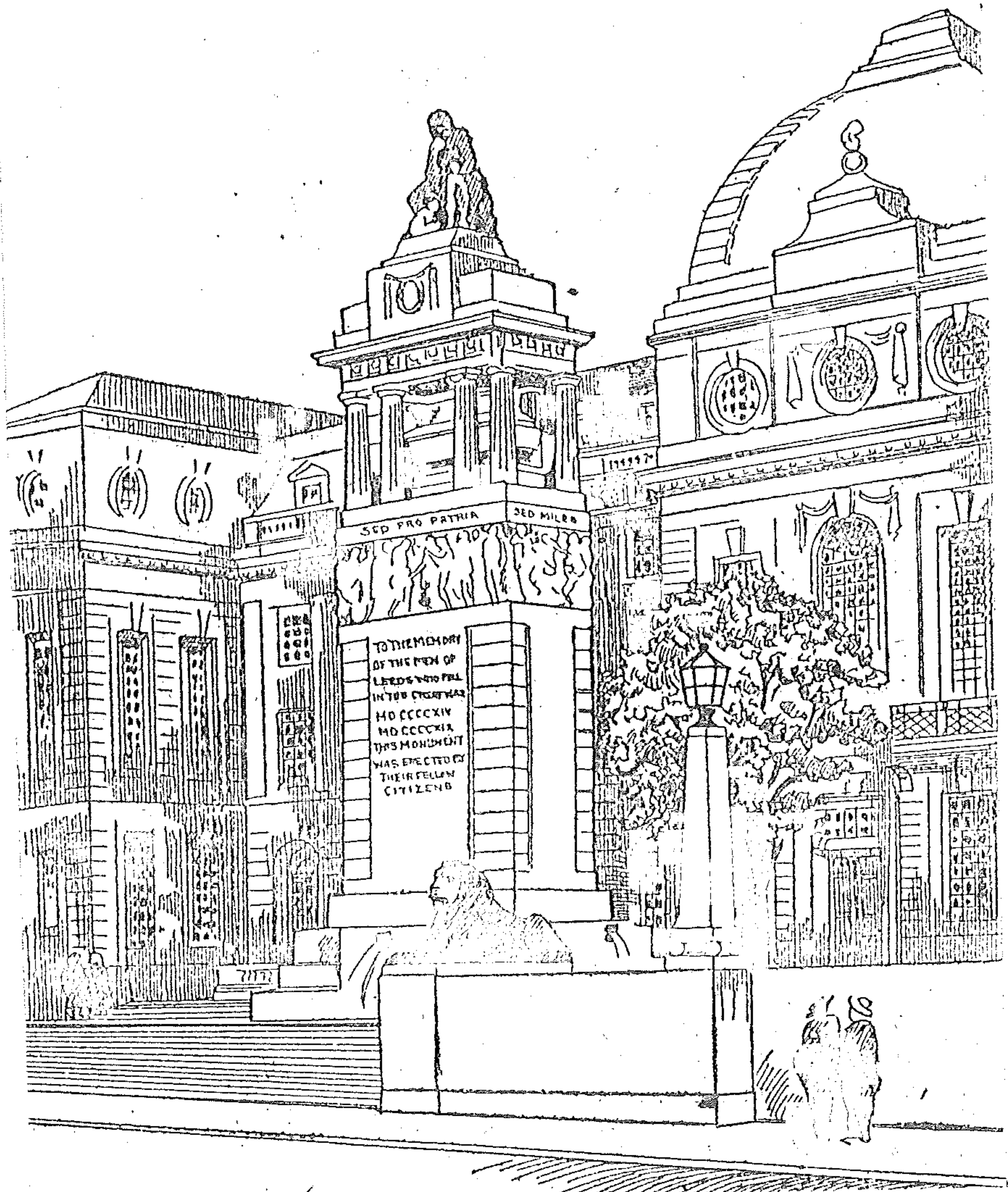


41. Glasgow, J. Burnet, 1924

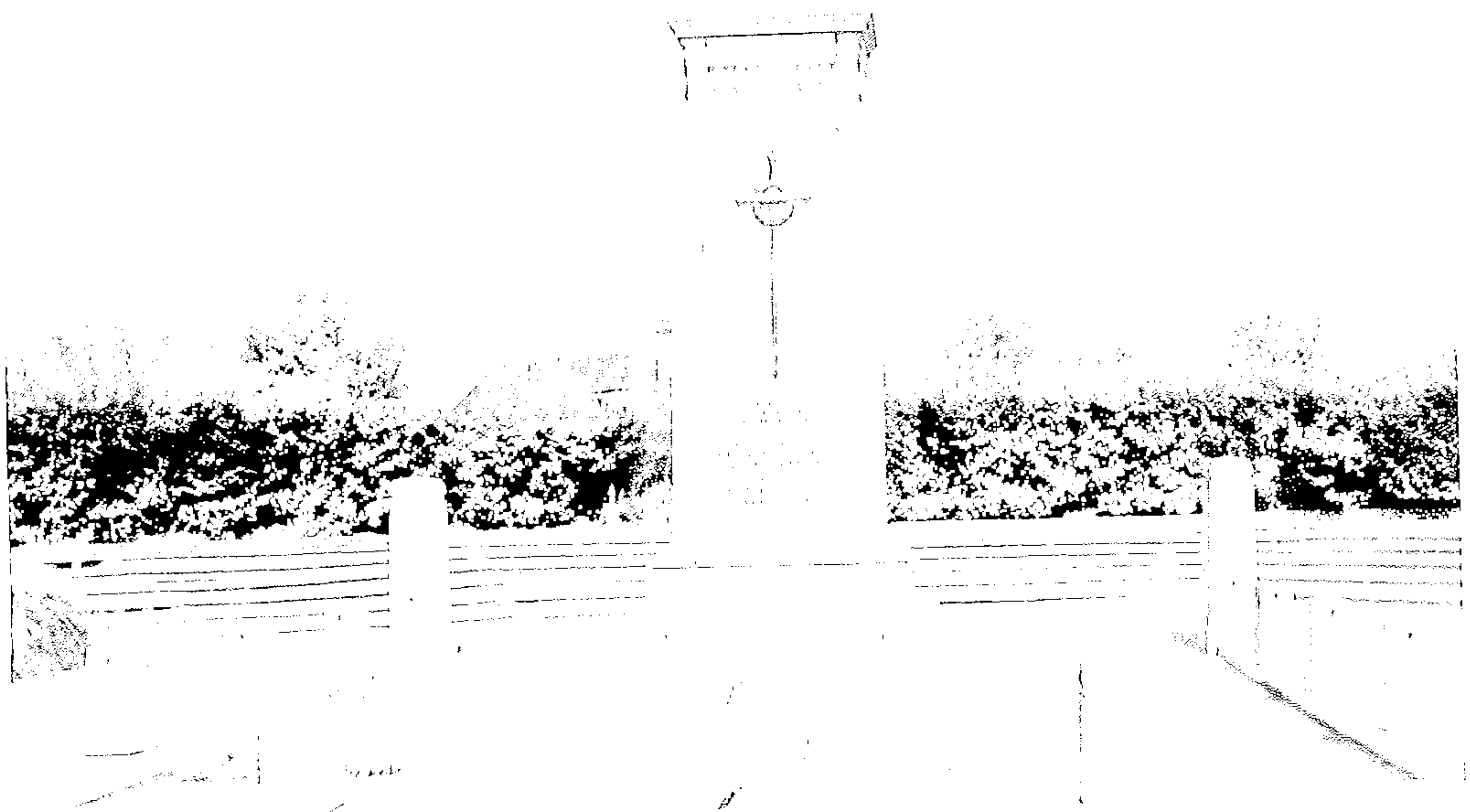


42. Cumberland and Westmorland, R. Lorrimer, 1922



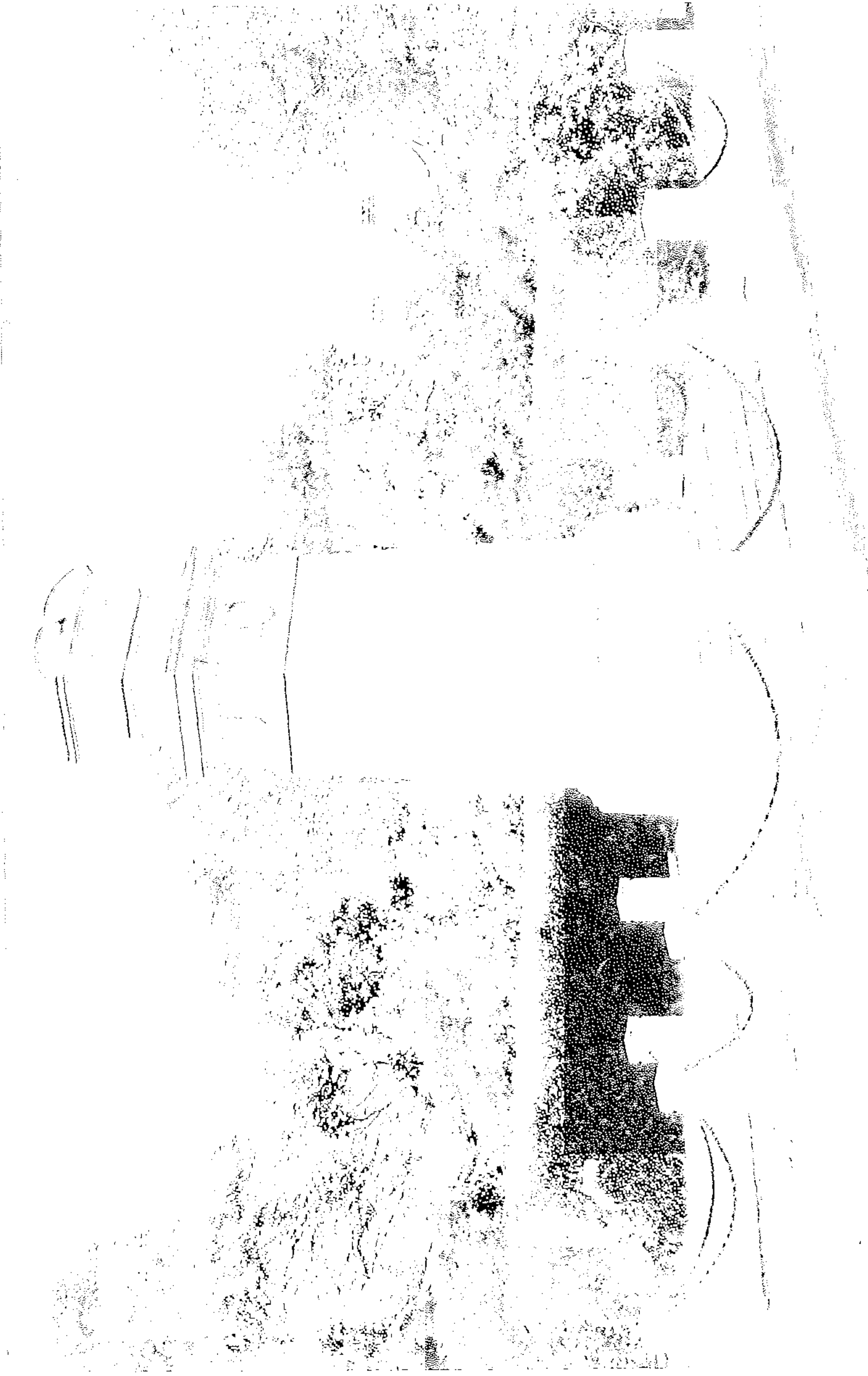


43. Design for Leeds, R. Blomfield, 1920

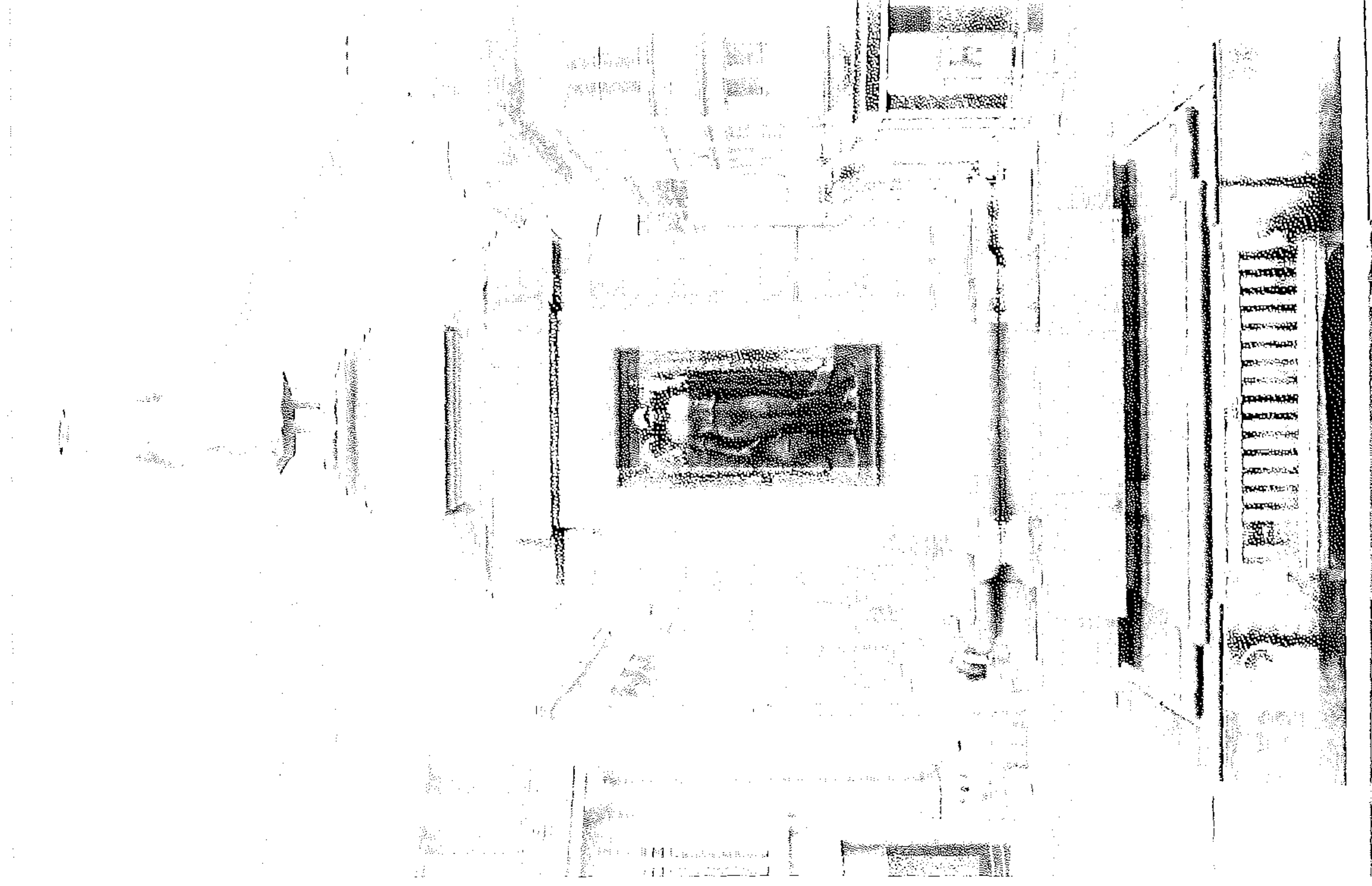


44. Edmonton, Messrs Griffiths and Co., 1924





45. Enfield, 1925



46. Barnsley, J. Tweed, 1925, showing panel representing victory

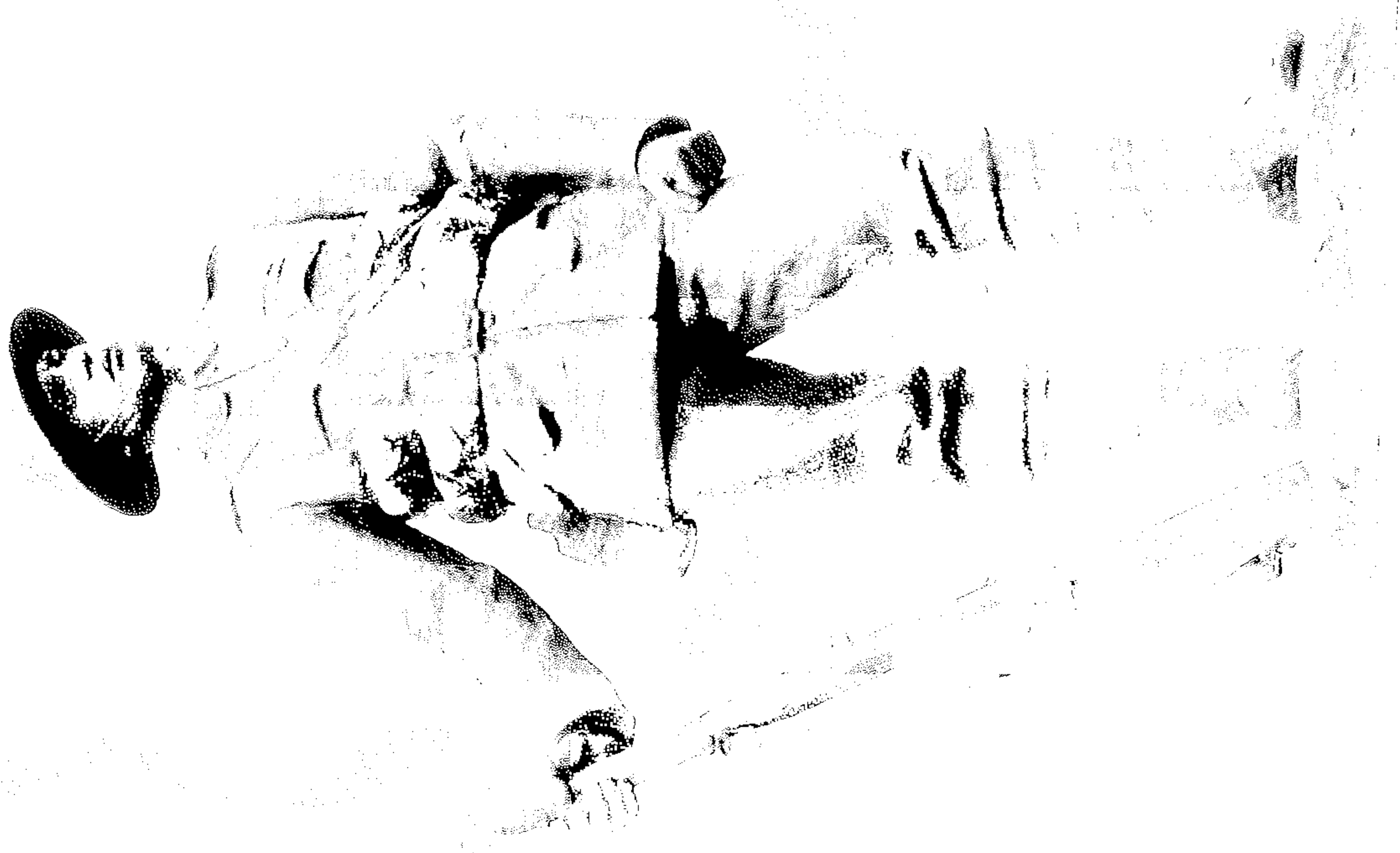




47. Keighley, H.C.Fehr, 1924, detail



48. Barnsley, detail

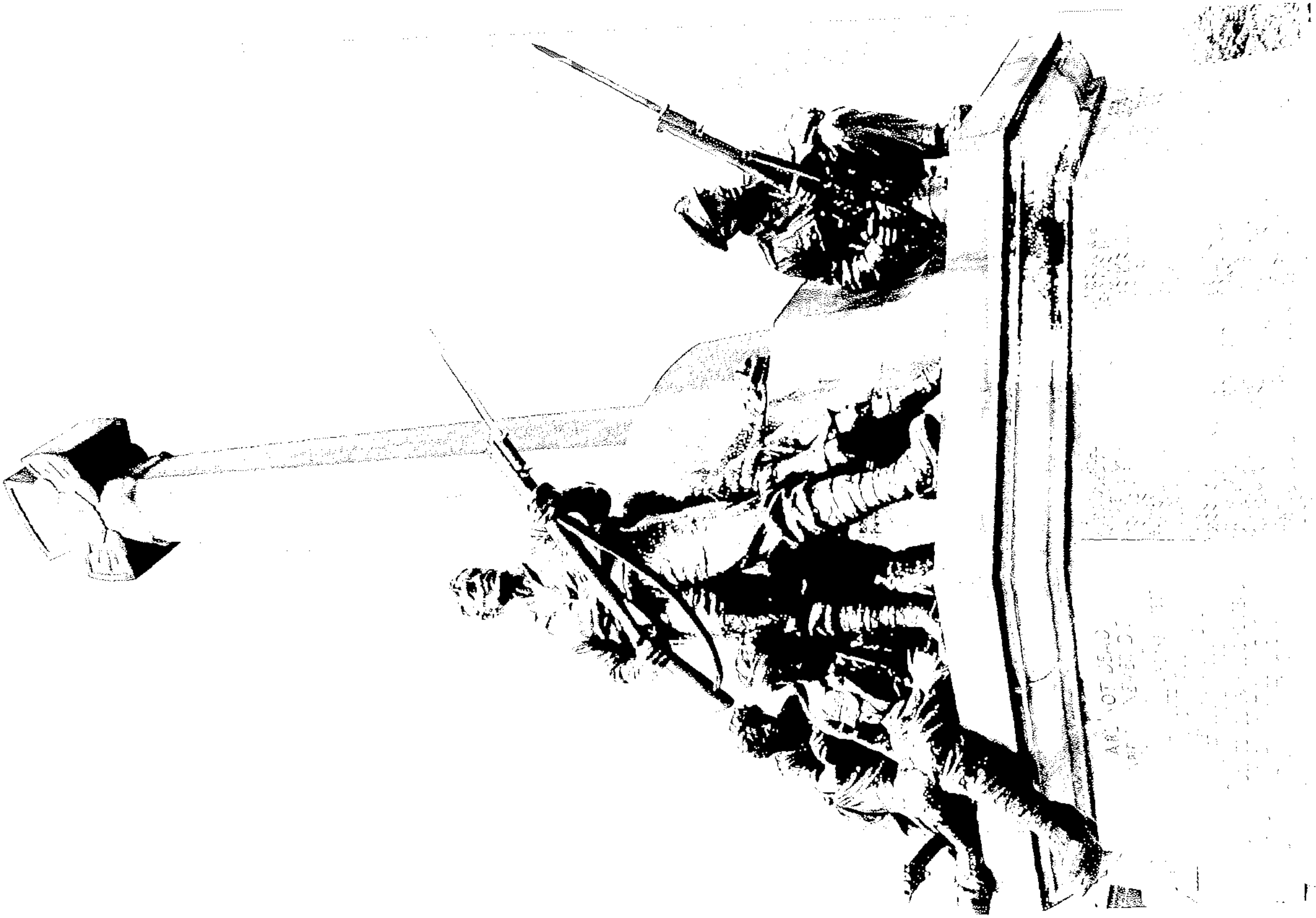


49. Rifle Corps, J. Tweed, 1921, detail



50. London Troops, A. Drury, 1920, detail



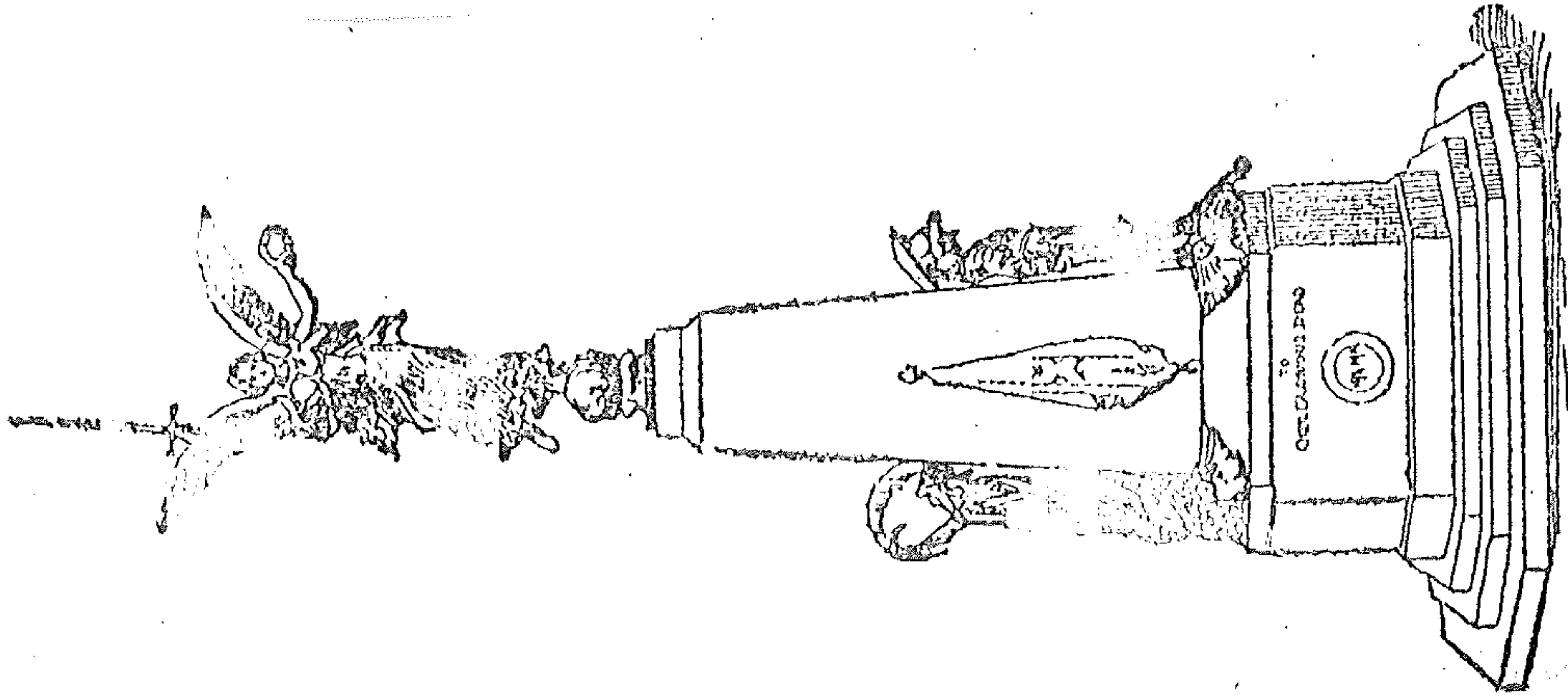


51. Lever Brothers', W.Goscombe John, 1921

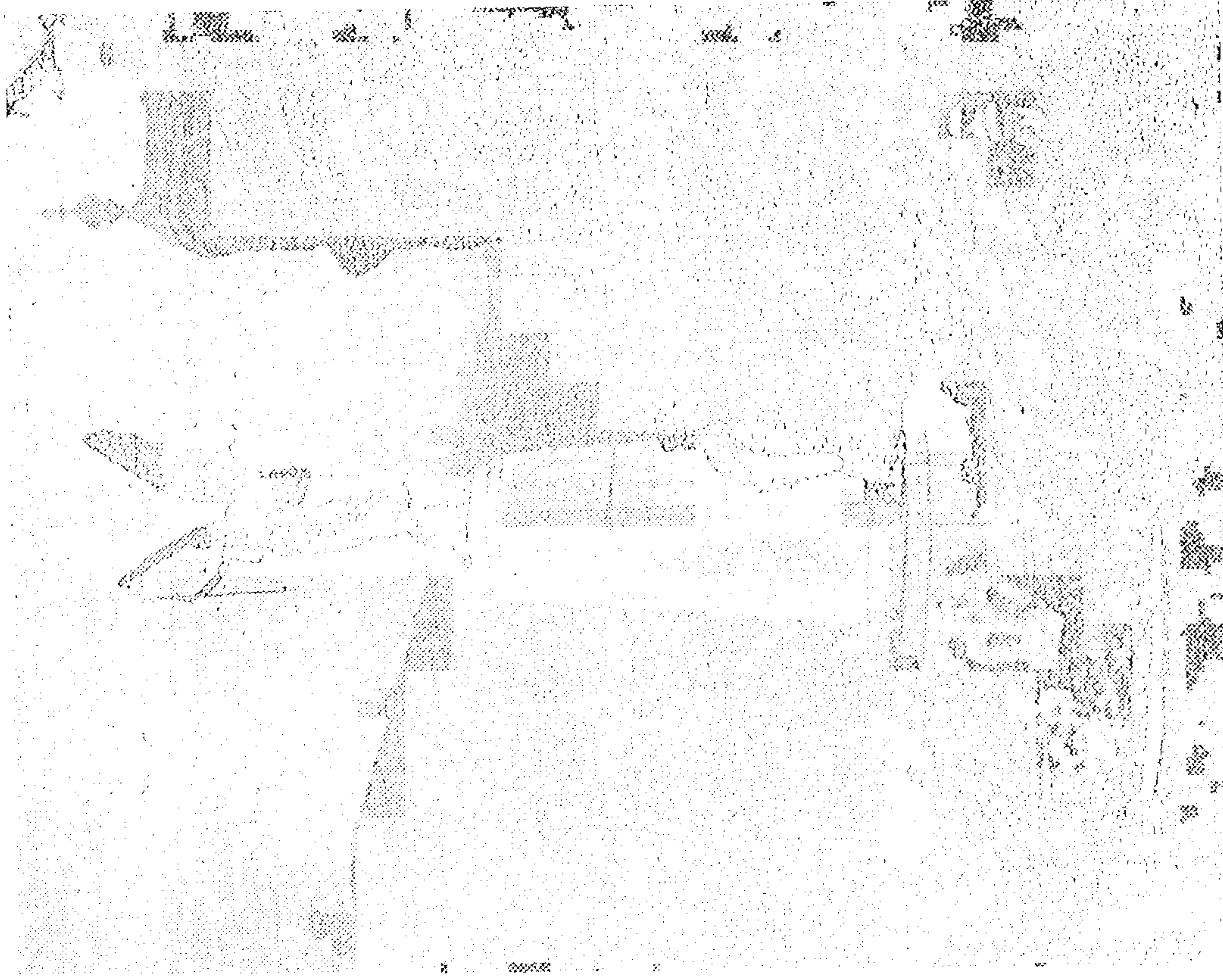


52. Finsbury, T.Rudge, 1921, detail





53. Design for Leeds  
H.C.Fehr, 1922



54. Leeds, unveiling, 21 Oct. 1922



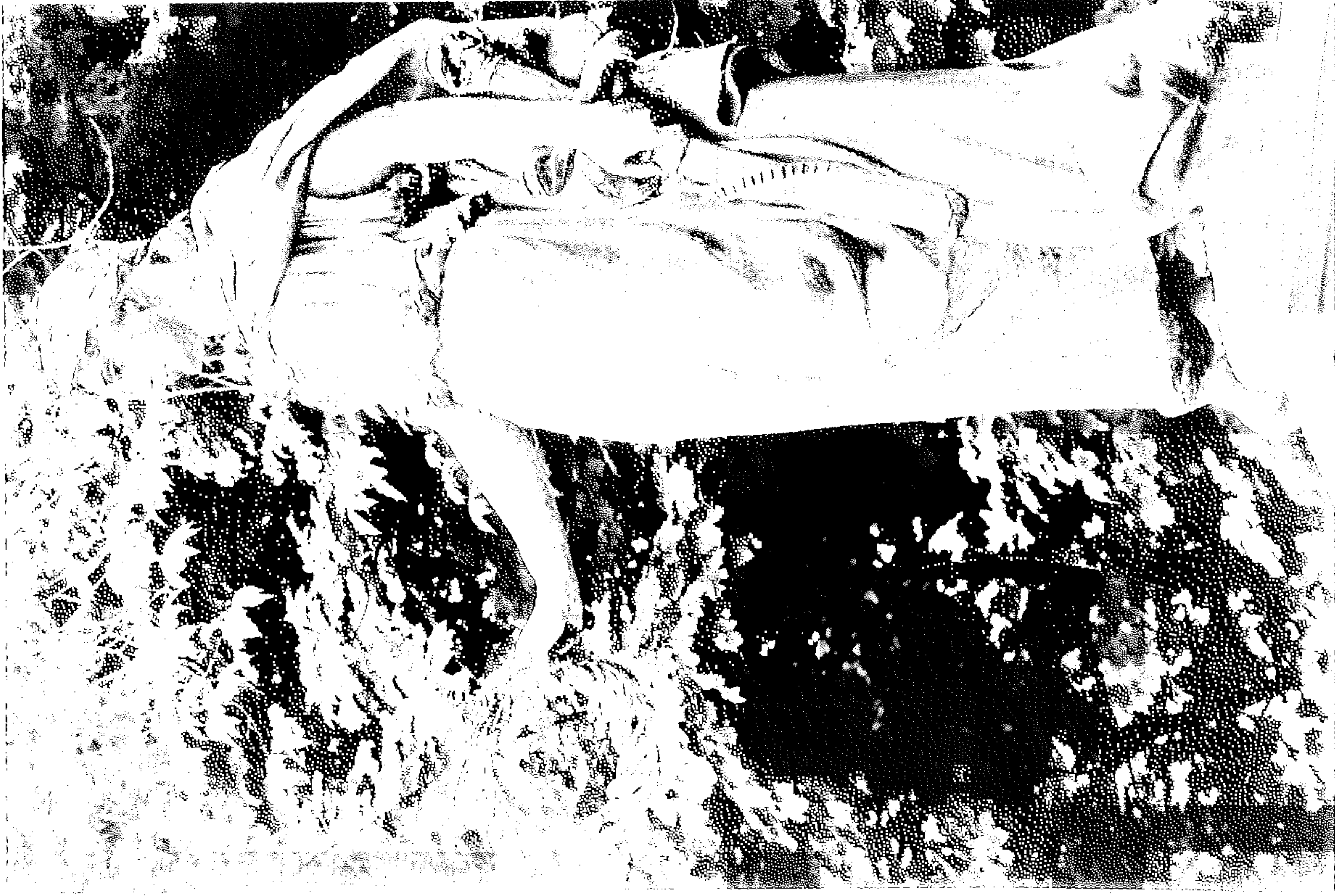


55. Leeds, detail (The owl represents Leeds)

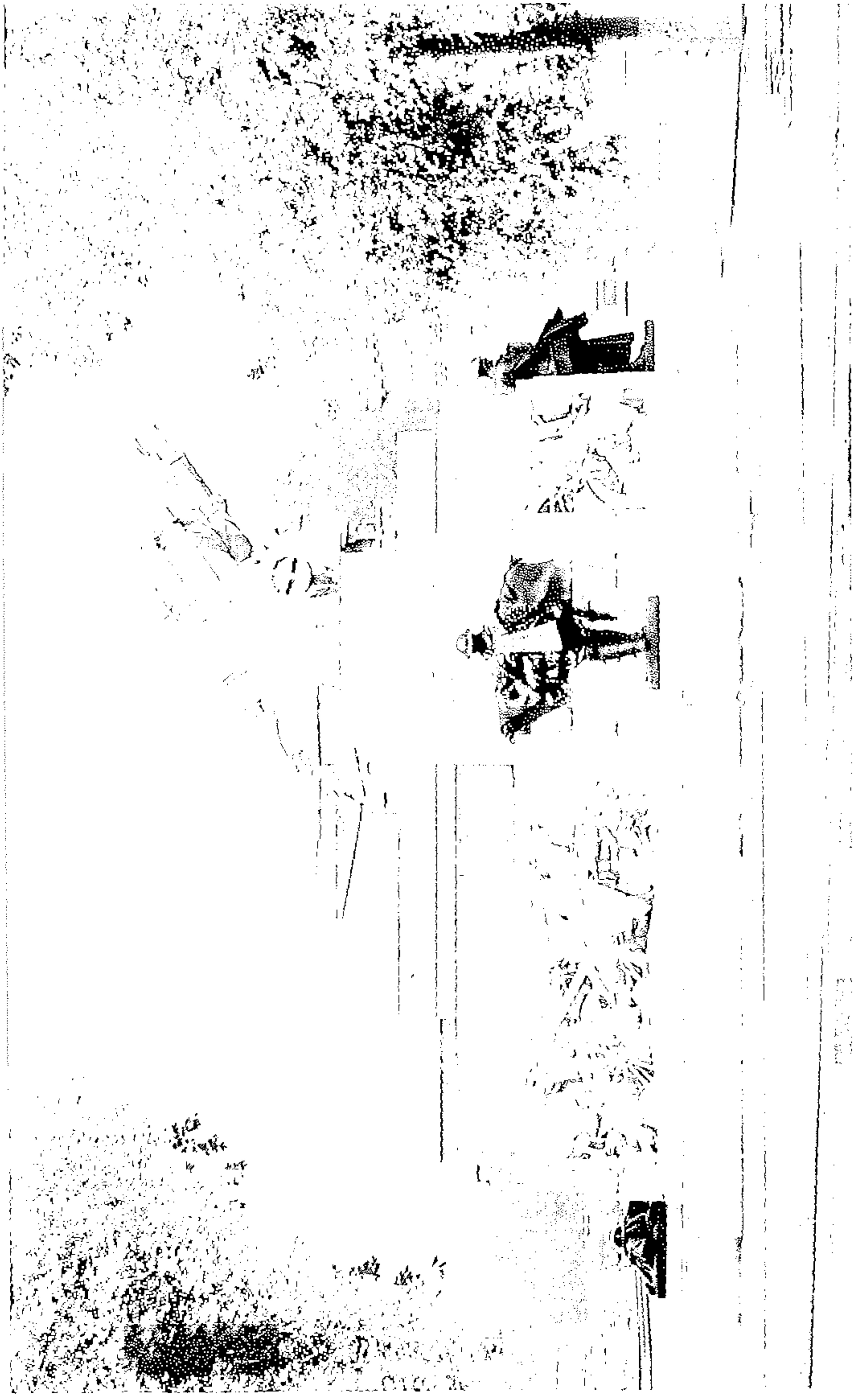


56. Thornton, H. Brownsword, 1922, detail



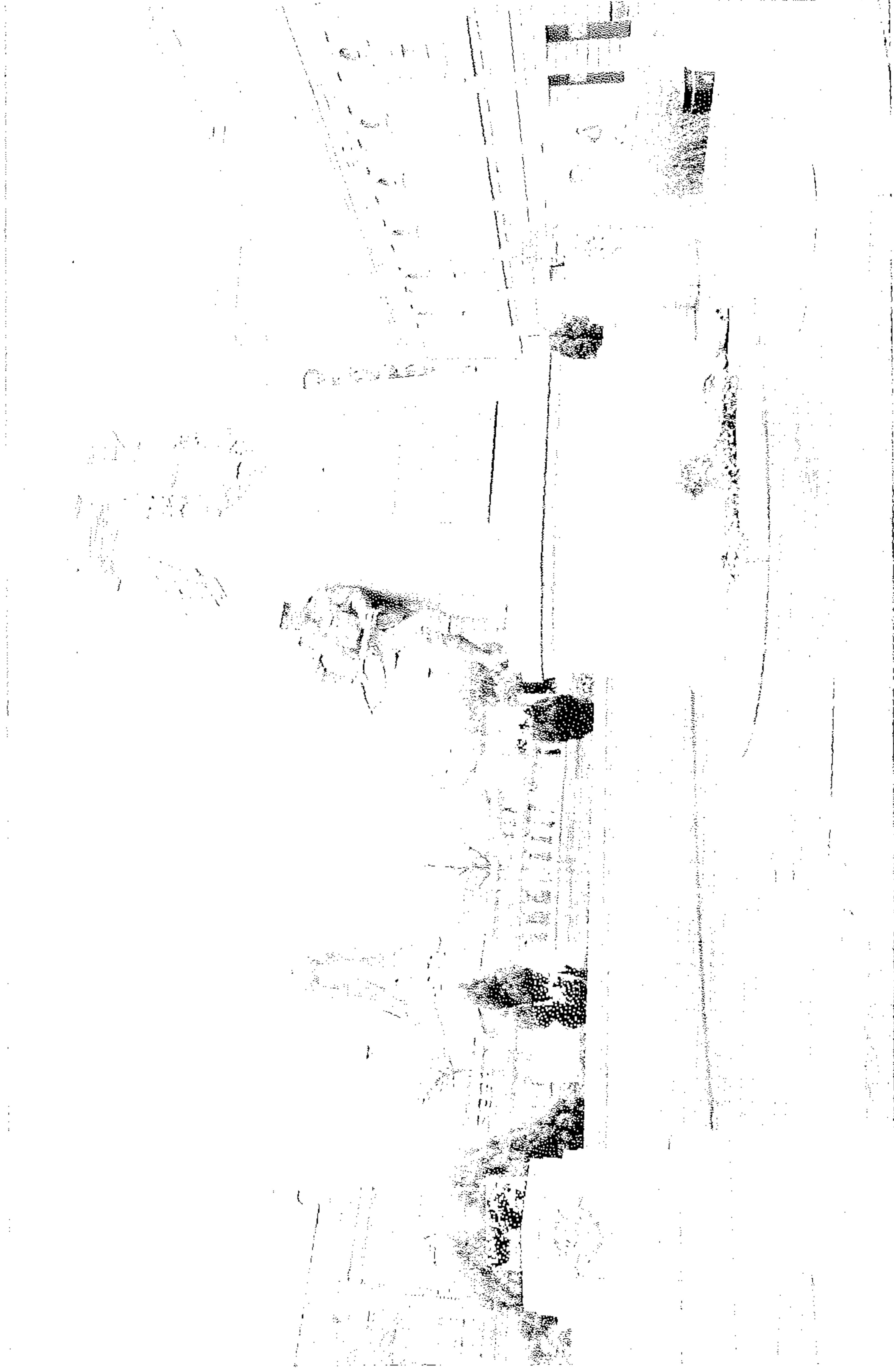


57. Eccleshill, H. Brownsword, 1922, detail



58. Royal Artillery



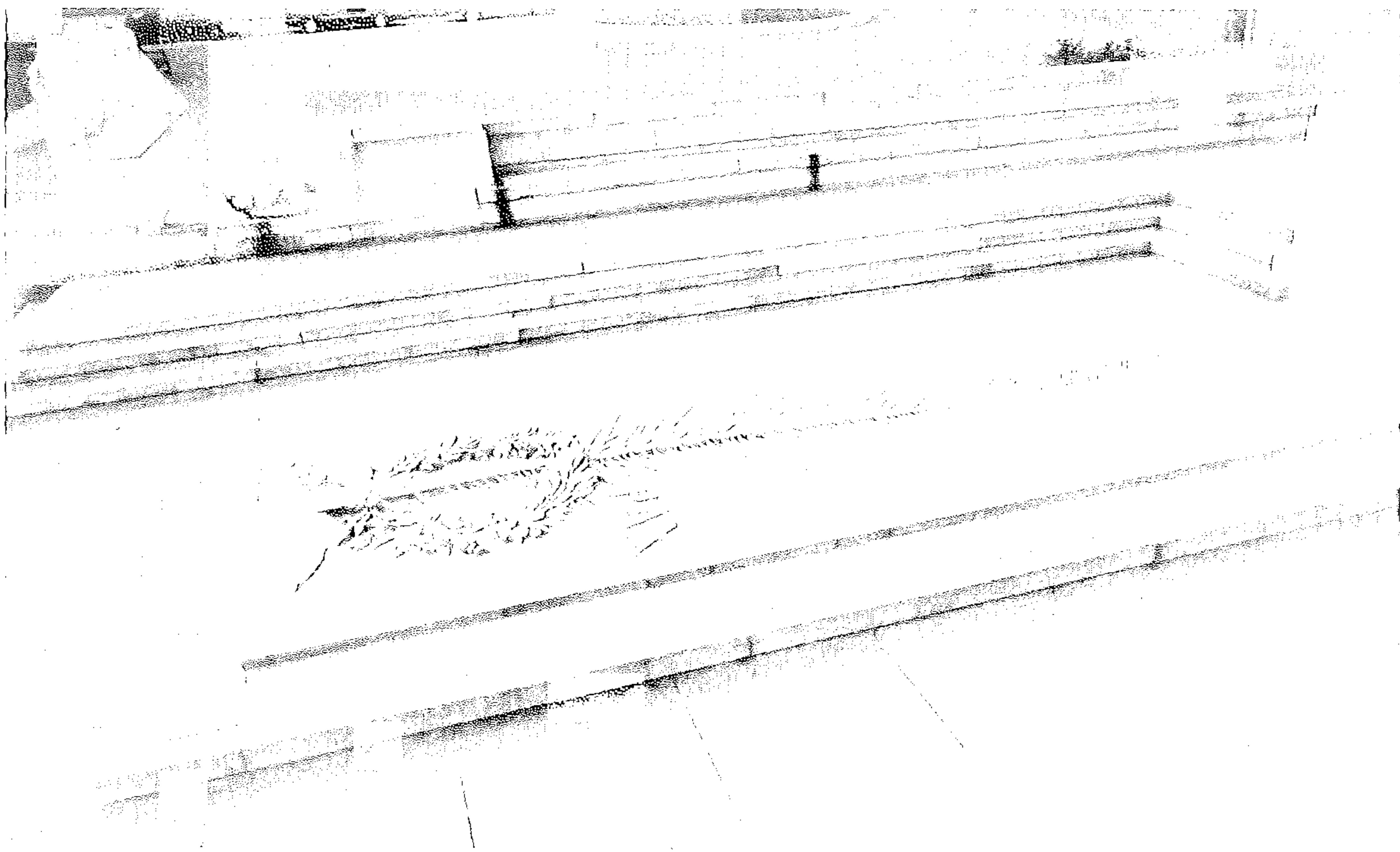


59. Bradford, W. Williamson and H.S. Wright, 1922

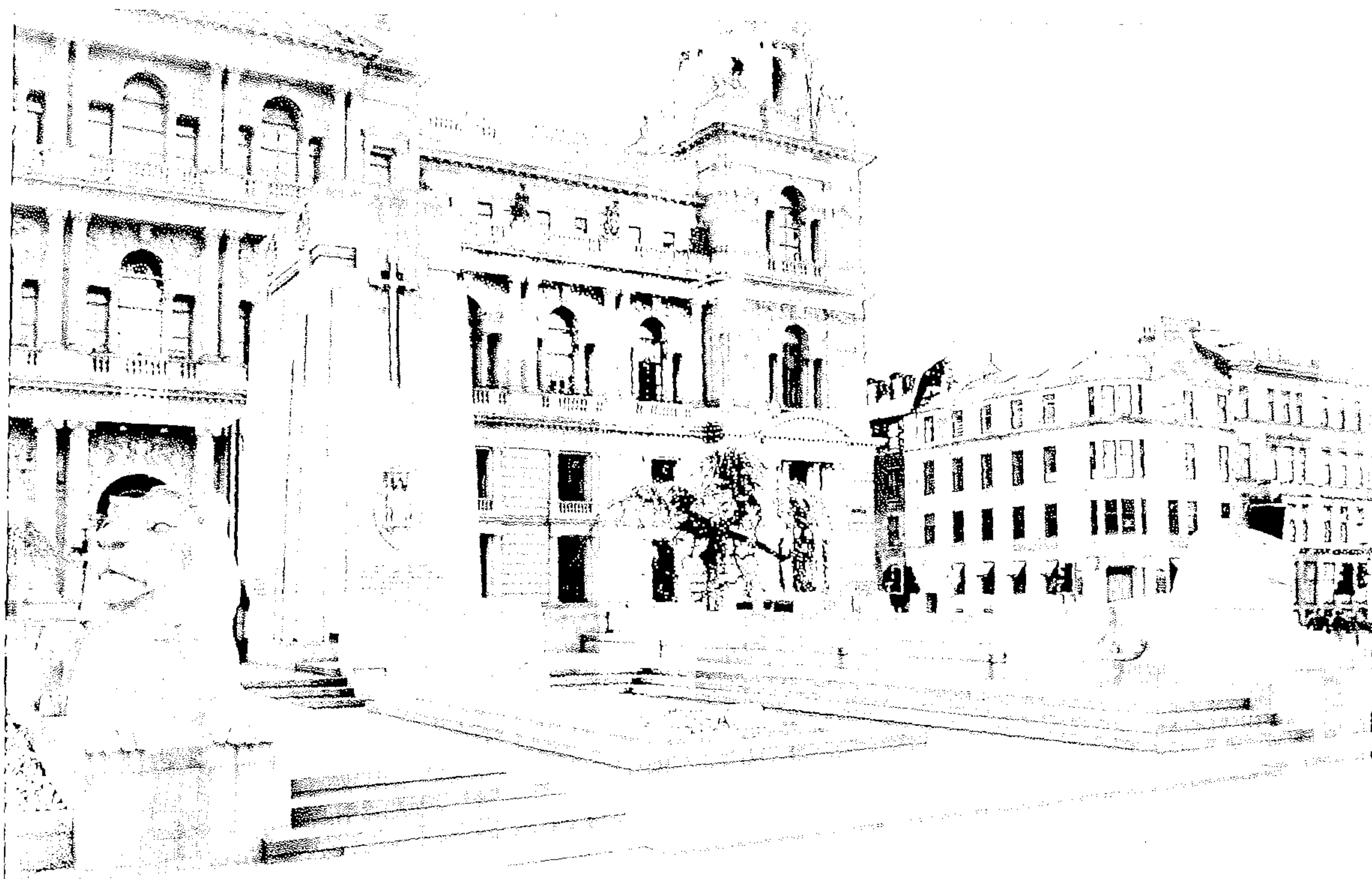


60. Bradford, detail

(The blade of the offending bayonet  
is now missing)



61. Glasgow, detail



62. Glasgow